

**Wings
on
my
Feet**

**Howard
Wodum**





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Wings on My Feet

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BLACK ULYSSES AT THE WARS

BY HOWARD W. ODUM

Author of Rainbow Round My Shoulder

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Wings on My Feet

I. Do You Think I'll Make a Soldier?

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DO YOU THINK I'LL MAKE A SOLDIER?

I

WAR an' me is buddies, fightin's my middle name. What you see in the books an' papers I can tell you 'bout an' mo', 'cause I was there. Yes, Lawdy, Lawd, I was there, comin' an' goin', startin' an' fallin', diggin' an' fightin', unloadin' an' haulin', an' Lawd, Lawd, stayin' there too. I'm magic black boy, rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet. War never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me.

Me an' war same thing. Want me to fight; I been doin' it all my life. Actual fact. I'm bastard soldier of the Cross. I'm high brown, black, mean an' lean. I ain't no tenderfoot, soft skinned, fat bellied an' green. I'm long an' tall, hard boiled, chocolate to the bone, a too-loo shaker, an' Zulu fighter from bloody fightin' tribes of Africa. I done had me a little war all my own. I been fightin' east, west, north an' south, shootin' an' cuttin', breakin' up them jamborees.

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Born in North Car'lina,
Raised in Tennessee,
Work like hell in Georgia,
Died in German-e-e-e.

Want me to march in rain all day an' mud all night.
Well, all my days captain been workin' me in rain
an' hail. Gonna need my angel rubber overcoat an'
patent leather shoes. Sholy is so, me an' war same
thing. Make me sleep standin' an' marchin', settin'
down an' rollin' over an' every other kind o' way;
well, rock been my pillow and freezin' ground my
foldin' bed for many po' weary day. Bible say deep
sleep fell on Adam; well, Adam didn't have nothin'
on me. March me all day an' night, don't give me
nothin' to eat, nothin' to drink, no place to sleep.
Well, I been travelin' down that long, lonesome
road, po' boy long way from home ever since I lef'
my mama's house, singin' high-stepper, Lawd, you
shall be free, yes, by God, when good Lord set you
free.

Six long months have passed
Since I have slept in bed,
Ain't eat square meal in three long weeks,
Money thinks I'm dead.

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Want to take me 'cross deep blue sea. Well, I been workin' on river boats, an' I been in navy, too. Been shanghaied once. Went 'cross sea one time, didn't mean to go. Lawdy, Lawd, ridin' that French ship, sailor man to big Frog captain.

But I ain't gonna ride that ocean no mo',
Gonna walk right home to my cabin do',
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

Diggin' trenches and buildin' railroads and bridges like ole times to me. Unloadin' ships an' ammunition easy thing to do ever since I worked on county roads an' railroad gangs. Lord, the hotter the sun, the better I feel. Me an' war's buddies, diggin's my middle name.

Black man fights with shovel an' pick,
Never gits no rest 'cause he never gits sick.
Lord, let yo' sunshine fall on me.

If I be camp cook in dugout kitchen, jes' like slingin' slop an' fohty-fohs for shack-rouster in construction camp. Drivin' ammunition team make me think of Mike an' Jerry, red mule buddies, hike from Rome to Decatur in one day. Gotta be iron-jawed; well, shack-rouster's my other name.

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I ain't no red-shadow drinkin' that French cognac like I is when I'm half split, 'bout high as Georgia pine wid sho'-'nuf co'n likker. But Lawdy, Lawd, I needs it jes' the same; got to have it to keep me hard as blue steel, right wid the world, rockin' in slime, peepin' through muddy water to see dry land. An' little French mamyselles ain't nothin' to me; I got me three high yallers, an' two teasin' browns.

It takes a long, lean, lanky brown,
To make a rabbit fight a houn';
It takes a long tall yaller brown,
To make a preacher lay his Bible down.

Army ain't got nothin' on me gamblin'; I can roll them dice an' I ain't gonna lose; I'm gamblin' man, can century that money, shootin' for my honey, throw seven an' 'leven in the promised land. If need me to run an' fly, I got wings on my feet an' ain't no disgrace to run when you git skeered. I been trained a heap in my day, an' I can run from Jerry jes' same as I can run from the Law, or I can meet Jerries like I can meet desperado Bill.

'Way over yonder in No Man's Land,
Ain't no place for corn-field hand,
Backed right back to do my best,
Run right in machine-gun nest,
Runnin', soldier, you shall be free.

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Some folks say soldier can't run,
Well, let me tell you what this soldier done;
Lef' battle-front 'bout settin' o' the sun,
Run into Paris 'bout half pas' one,
Well, won't I be movin', child?

Well, if it's singin' soldiers you lookin' for, I can sing an' I can pray an' never tire. I can tell tall tales an' joree jaw. I can weep an' I can moan. I been worryin' all my day. I'm worried now, won't be worried long. I'm gonna back myself back in mountain, to play bad, Lawd, to play bad.

An' I'm gonna live anyhow till I die, an' if I got to die for my Lord, Cap'n Jesus waitin' in the promised land. Howsomever I don't want to ride no golden chariot. I don't want to wear no golden crown, I want to stay here.

Well, if I live an' don't git killed,
Gonna make my home in Jacksonville,
An' I know a place in Tennessee,
Where spring fried chicken waitin' for me.

But some things I seen in big war I ain't never seen befo'. Some places I went to I ain't never been befo'. Some folks from all over God's heaven I seen I ain't never met befo'. Some things I done I ain't

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never done befo', an' some feelin's I had I ain't never had befo'. Sometimes I been skeered like I ain't never been skeered befo', well, I don't know, Lawd, I don't know. Howsomever, nothin' to do about it, goddam. I ain't no hero an' I ain't no coward. Maybe I don't want to go, maybe I do, but what 'bout it? Don't make dam' bit o' difference. Tote my rabbit foot to charm fightin' Hun so he can't do no harm.

Some o' these mornin's gonna wash my face,
Gonna eat my breakfast in Jerry's place.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

Maybe I git treated better in army than in construction camp, maybe I don't, don't make no difference, goddam, got to go. I been travelin' man, got to travel mo'. Maybe I be seein' new country, rarin' to go; maybe I'm skeered like rabbit. All same to me. War seem like awful thing to other buddies, but me an' war jes' naturally *had* to be buddies; nothin' else to do. Talk about it, Lawd, Lawd, talk about it.

I never will forgit that old boat we went over on, 'scusin' sometimes seem like I done forgot whole dam' war. I been on boats a heap but this ship ain't like no ship I ever seen. Look like 'bout ten thou-

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sand black boys on board, packed in an' jammed up like Tennessee mules in stock car. Sho' did double boys up. Was heap o' companies, all colored soldiers, 'scusin' white captains, an' we had one colored captain I'm tellin' 'bout later. Big crowd soldiers make funny-lookin' sight, black an' tan, all sorts an' kinds, floatin' up above deep blue sea. Maybe some fightin' units, maybe some engineerin' companies, maybe labor battalions, struttin' their stuff. Sho' wus good-lookin' crowd, too, high steppin' an' proud, salutin' flag an' singin', an' fine manners on parade.

On, boat, howsomever, look mighty ragged. Some boys lookin' for submaroons 'fo' we leave New York, spectin' ship be blowed up, 'cause had instructions how to do if torpedo hit boat. Some act like monkeys an' clowns, some seem like ain't got a friend in this wide world. Some gamblin' an' fightin', some singin' an' prayin', some white eyed like po' mournin' dove, so sick don't keer what happens to 'em. Some boys cryin' sayin' wish they wus home, never would 'a' come to this man's army.

"Oh, Lord, will I ever git home again wid my toes turned down?" "Will I ever see my Mamie Lou an' sister Nell?" "Wish I could see my sweet old mom-

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mer now, standin' in door wid head hung down, tears fallin' to the floor." "Sweet Jesus, let yo' light shine on me; Germans ain't done nuthin' to me, I ain't done nothin' to them."

Lawd, I wonder, huh,
Lawd, I wonder, huh,
Will I ever git back home?

So there we all wus, old boat a-reelin' an' rockin'. Preachin' captain, weepin' boy, gamblin' Sam, crap-shootin' Charley, battlin' Kid, gloomy Johnson, Shorty Geech, funny Sambo, an' I'm struttin' round like I'm biggest one on ship. One fellow I be tellin' you 'bout again started gamblin' befo' we leave sight of Liberty. 'Nother fellow always fightin'; soldiers mos' generally fightin' 'mong 'selves but this bird fightin' ever chance he git.

Howsomever, one big boy in beginnin' o' this trip nearly knock him off'n ship an' stopped him from suckin' eggs little while anyway. Skeered him nearly to death, holdin' on to rail an' hollerin' won't somebody save him. Oh, Lordy, won't somebody come an' save him. Boys let him hang on while an' kick an' beg somebody to help him. Sho' was funny sight, great big black soldier, biggest-mouthed fighter on ship, hollerin' an' cryin' jes' like baby—

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"Won't somebody save me, oh, Lordy, Lordy, won't somebody save me?"

Well, boys pulled him up but sho' did rag life out o' him. Laugh at him jes' like he ain't nothin' but big piece o' cheese or sumpin' on stick. Big boy git so mad he 'side hisself, flyin' round sayin' he wish to God all dam' niggers over in sea where sharks an' fishes make a fuss over 'em. Said he wusn't gonna pay 'em no mind. So I says to him, how 'bout big boy Jonah swallerin' whale? Wus he gonna do it or wus he not? So he says he's gonna smack my face off. So I tells him the thing to do, damit, is to do it then; "Here I is, ain't no river between us." He's big black-skinned bully an' goes off mutterin' sump-in' to hisself. Maybe he's heap better fighter than I is, too, but I had him bluffed an' he never did bother wid me no mo'.

Two buddies always keep us laughin' wid their pranks and jokes an' songs. Jes' couldn't help bein' funny. Never could learn nothin', neither how to keep step, squad right, squad left, squad face about nor nothin'. Always gettin' leggins an' clothes all on wrong. But everybody seem to like 'em an' eve'y-body laugh at 'em. Could git away with anything. One day crap-shootin' Charley wus down on his

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knees rollin' bones when captain come 'long. So he says to officer passin' by he ruther shoot craps than pawn his rain-coat. He don't do nothin' but keep on shoutin':

"Come on, bones, an' treat me nice,
Roll 'em, soldier, roll them dice."

Then he mutters, "Boss, 'scuse me, but I gits tired jumpin' up salutin' officers every three minutes. I'm gonna stay here till I gits even with this boy." Captain jes' laugh an' says, "Oh, Lord, what a sonof-a-gun." Other boy was funny, too, always banterin', could out-joree devil hisself.

Believe biggest fool I ever see,
Big black soldier from Tennessee;
No, biggest fool I ever saw,
Come from state of Arkansas,
Put his shirt on over his coat,
Button his britches up round his throat.

But what I'm tellin' you 'bout now is time sho'-'nuf submaroon jes' 'bout got us when Germans caught ship nappin' somewhere out in wide ocean. Boys all out havin' good time, didn't have no warnin'. Seen little white streak comin' cross water an' lookin' way over yonder seen devil periscope goin' down in sea.

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Boys begin hollerin' an' prayin', an' runnin' an' shoutin', an' sayin', "Lawd, will we ever git home again, maybe eve'y las' one be drowned in deep blue sea." Howsomever, captain at hellum seen torpedo first an' speed up ship an' zizzag an' turn old boat side so quick torpedo missed us clean, but boat shook boys up. They don't know whether we been hit or not an' they don't know when 'nother little white streak be comin' 'cross water.

So colored chaplain captain I been tellin' 'bout starts prayin'. Prayin' Johnson wus his name, prayin' till he die. That colored captain sholy could pray better'n preacher in pulpit an' soldiers praying wid him like shoutin' Christians in church meetin' in Georgia. Boys jined wid him never did pray befo'. Bad as I wus, dog bite my cats, if I wusn't hollerin' to King Jesus to save my soul. 'Fo' God never heard such a prayin' since I been bohn. Captain Johnson could pray fas' but not fas' 'nuf for soldiers. All boys tryin' to pray same things captain wus sayin', only mo' so an' faster. Oh, Lord, what a prayin' an' shoutin', you oughta been there, goddam.

Captain Johnson prayin', "Oh, Lord, help yo' helpless believin' children." . . .

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Soldiers prayin', "Yes, yes, my Lord, oh, Lord, help yo' helpless children." "Oh, my God, will we ever git home again?" "Oh, Lord Jesus . . ."

Captain keep a prayin', "Oh, Lord, the spirit is will-in' but the flesh is weak, help yo' helpless children." . . .

All soldiers prayin' on, "Yes, my God, mighty weak an' helpless 'gainst that dynamite." "Oh, Lord, help yo' helpless children." "Yes, my God, Pharaoh's army got drowned, save this army."

Captain keep a prayin', "Oh, Lord, yo' children on board ship of life tryin' to be soldiers of the Cross. Save us, oh, Lord, save us if you please."

Soldiers cryin' out, "Talkin' brother." "Yes, my Lord." "Oh, my God, will I ever see my mother again?" "Save po' boy long way from home." "Jes' save me this time an' I won't be sinner no mo'." "Oh, Lord, I'm long way from my moma's house."

Captain keep a prayin', "Oh, Lord, let this be good ole ship of Zion. Oh, Jesus, please come on board and save yo' believin' children. Lordy, won't you help me, help me this time?"

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Soldiers drown out captain's prayer, "Yes, Lord Jesus, Jesus is a listenin' all day long." "Amen, good Lord, oh, my God, have mercy on po' sinners." "Oh, Lord, I'm long way from where I come from." "This ole ark's moverin', feel like she sinkin' down." "Oh, Lord, hold it up. . . ."

Captain keep on prayin', "Oh, Lord, save us to fight battles of the Lord. Oh, Lord, hear us when we pray, may be las' time, I don't know, maybe all on board go down. Oh, Lord Jesus, save us from sinkin' sea an' send us back home."

Lord, I wants two wings to veil my face,
Lord, I wants two wings to "fly away."

So captain keeps on prayin', soldiers keep on joinin' in. Some have big voices, some small, some loud an' prayin', some low an' singin', some chantin', some hummin', some shoutin', all like deep rumblin' voice of ship an' Jehovah on Mountain. Big blue heaven above an' deep blue sea below, ship sailin' on, sound like rumblin' up in sky, seem like King Jesus flyin' by. Then prayin' slow down, boys lookin' an' listenin' seein' if ship wus sinkin'.

Ole ship moverin' 'long jes' like she boss of the sea.

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Captain tell us she's all right an' what he gonna do for that submaroon be plenty. Sholy wus good to see all captains an' Law fightin' to help boys out o' trouble. He, he—I been used to seein' captains an' Law tryin' to git me in trouble all day long.

Well, transports an' 'stroyer boats look like big buddies steamin' an' smokin' and shootin' at submaroon like man with big fohty-fohs. One ship roll big death bomb down in sea to see could it blow up submaroon. Deep sea an' waves shaped up like big dish, ships risin' an' fallin' up out of hole. Mighty pretty sight. Sea so wide look like ships in blue heaven floatin' round.

Lawdy, Lawd, boys feelin' better. Chaplain captain start song, slow an' easy, leadin' way, then risin' high an' strong an' eve'ybody singin' now jes' lak eve'ybody prayin' minute ago. Black devils singin' like black angels from promised land, song sweepin' up an' rollin' out on waves, swayin' like big ship itself. Never heard such singing, swellin' like Kingdom Come, an' me singin' jes' big as anybody, goddam.

Do you think I'll make a soldier,
Do you think I'll make a soldier,
Do you think I'll make a soldier,
Soldier of the Cross?

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I am climbin' Jacob's ladder,
I am climbin' Jacob's ladder,
I am climbin' Jacob's ladder,
Soldier of the Cross.

So boys keep a singin' 'bout "Right shoe give God all the glory," "Every round be higher an' higher"; an' some boys feel so good want to climb right up in sky, gonna be soldiers of the Cross, goddam. Then song slow down an' captain say, "Well, boys, Lawd wus with us, maybe every man on board gonna git across safe an' back home." 'Co'se he don't know then what's comin' to us, but helped our feelin's, Lawd, Lawd, we feel heap better. Got to thinkin' 'bout s'pose that white streak hit us, howsomever, an' make us think 'bout big ship *Titanic* sinkin' with many souls on board. So we struck up that song, singin' little mo' slowly and kinder sorrowful.

It was on Monday morning 'bout one o'clock,
When great *Titanic* began to reel an' rock,
People begin to scream an' cry, sayin'
"Lord, have mercy, am I goin' to die?"
It was sad when the big ship went down.

It was sad when big ship went down,
Don't you know it was sad when big ship
went down?

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Husbands an' wives an' little children
lost their life,
Oh, Lord, it was sad when big ship went
down.

People on ship were long way from home,
Friends all round, didn't know their
time had come,
Death come ridin' by—sixteen hundred
had to die,
It was sad when big ship went down.

Howsomever, boys feelin' better now, sayin', "Well, ole strumpet, *this* ship didn't go down." Prayin' captain still lookin' up at the heaven, trying to sing sumpin' 'bout ole Satan mad and he was glad, 'cause he missed some souls he thought he had. But boys don't pay him no mind. So other boys git to joreein' an' cussin' an' laughin' an' singin' funny songs. So I hollers: "Parson, you an' captain at hellum and smokin' Uncle Sam ships done saved us from devil, glory, glory." One big fellow start 'nother song 'bout *Titanic*, an' boys git to singin' an' hollerin' an' laughin':

Oh, whut wus you singing,
When ship went down,
When ship went down?

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Settin' on a mule's back,
Singin' Alabama boun',
Oh, that ocean, that deep wide ocean.

Some verses so funny won't do to tell 'bout 'em, Lawdy, Lawd, hot papas struttin' their stuff. So boys done forgot all 'bout bein' skeered an' promisin' Lord how good they gonna be. Gits to playin' an' gamblin' an' fightin' an' havin' good time. Wus a Y. M. C. A. song leader on ship an' he thought he'd start 'em to singin' again. So he tried to git boys to sing. Boys don't do nothin' but look at him, maybe some of 'em smile an' some glare at him. Maybe one or two good boys start singin' an' others sorta snicker an' they stops.

So this fellow, turrible singer, too, high-stepper an' fine voice, steps out an' hollers at us. "Well, boys, are you gonna sing or not? If you ain't just let me know and I'll stop this foolishness." So, boys tell him he better stop it then. And myself, I was feelin' my hell a-risin' an' so I tells this fellow he ain't no songster, neither musicianer nor music physicianer. An' so he says to me, "Well, my good man, you soldiers have not yet come to appreciate high quality of singing which I give you."

"Hell, who's good man," I says. "Not me, I'm

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bad man, bad as Hell, I know. An' don't be callin' me yo' good man; I done sold my soul to the devil an' my heart done turned back to stone." By this I was signifyin' I want him to leave me alone.

But boys did git to singing 'nother time that day. Long jus' 'fo' sun went down, boys git mighty homesick and sorrowful. Thinkin' 'bout homefolks an' wishin' they wus back in United States an' wonderin' what gonna happen to 'em in war. This evenin' sunset awful red an' look like copper fire. Sometimes look to me like light from meltin' steel in good ole Birmingham. Sometime look like blood an' one time look like big copper cent settin' in yellow an' red, sea all glowin' like fire. Mighty fearsome sight, an' captain tell us sho' sign storm comin' up. Boys mighty quiet an' oneasy, too. Sea so smooth an' eve'ything more quiet than we seen it on ocean since we got on board. So boys feel like sea too big for 'em, an' I members little sayin' we played as children 'bout sea bein' so deep an' wide, sea ain't got no bottom or side. Well, that's way we feel about it now.

Seem like mighty long way from home, mighty long way from where we come from, mighty long way from France, long way from dry land. Jes' us an' sea an' feelin's, make us wonder, Lawd, would we ever

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git back again. Dark comin' on, winds begin to blow, waves git higher, rollin' high as two-story buildin', moanin' sound off 'cross waters. Transport ships rollin' off at distance, no lights on 'em. Sometimes look like chips floatin' in muddy creek, an' sometime jes' naturally look like big black devil witches, sometimes look like we could see them little dynamite streaks comin' 'cross waters. So night was comin' on, gittin' darker an' darker. Captain Johnson come along singin' an' passin' 'mong boys while they gittin' ready to go down in stalls an' put 'selves 'way for night. So some of boys sing with Captain Johnson.

Shine on me, shine on me,
Lord, I wonder will lighthouse
Shine on me, shine on me;
I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me an' rest,
Lie down ye wearied ones,
Thy head upon my breast."
Shine on me, shine on me,
Lord, I wonder will the lighthouse
Shine on me, shine on me.

So Captain Johnson an' some o' the boys sung little more, one song bein' 'bout King Jesus, listenin' all night long. But storm done comin' an' ship reelin'

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an' rockin'. Next day and nex' boys so sick don't know nothin', don't keer for nothin', storm make 'em so sea-sick an' so homesick, too. Some funny things happen, some sad ones too, boys bein' all sorts an' kinds, some never been on ocean an' some po' boys, green ruckies from eve'ywhere, all over States, specially from South. One po' buddy so sick throws his music box overboa'd. Boys been tryin' to git it from him. Never could. Now he thinks he's gonna die. Throws box in deep rollin' sea.

I was tellin' 'bout one time I was in storm and got so sick started cussin' storm to come an' git me, goddam. This time I jes' seem like I'm part of ship, or part of storm or wind or anything. I jes' take it best I can, nothin' else to do, goddam, 'scusin' sometime I think how I'm gonna tell about it when I git back, Lawd, gonna tell 'bout it.

One day I seed sailors savin' few soldiers been floatin' on raft after ship been torpedoed or sunk by storm or sumpin'. Never seen such a sight since I been born, sailors ridin' them waves in little boats, holdin' on to life ropes, pullin' boys in, high sea rollin' and boys climbin' up ship sides jes' lak spider up spider-web. I'm travelin' man and done

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heap o' things in my day but never could do like white sailors on rollin' sea; Lawd, big green waves with white foam, like dragon or mad dog or sum-pin', deep an' cold an' wet, captain standin' up on deck orderin' boys round jes' as easy as Cap'n Tero used to holler at us to wheel that dirt on railroad fill. Ain't no doubt 'bout it, Lawd, Lawd, Uncle Sam maybe starve us to death or pack boys together like shippin' hogs in box car, but sholy can take keer of us on sea.

Nex' day sea got smoother, boys all gittin' better an' eve'ybody knows we soon comin' in where we's headed. Nobody knows where we goin'. But ship slow down and big vessels an' little come out to meet us and boys glad we gonna see dry land again. Boys in awful mess and tempers, cussin' an' fightin'. Ain't got no money, can't roll them bones, ain't got no booze, clothes all dirty, ship all crowded, boys joreein' one 'nother and sassin' back 'bout folks back home, an' tellin' 'bout good times they had, won't be no mo'. Some of boys seem like animals and act jes' like I been tellin' 'bout back in labor camp, jes' ain't civilized. Howsomever, captains keep 'em going and when we come in sight of boats an' land boys git interested and begin to talk big and say what they gonna do to Jerries when they

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gets in Germany. Gonna git Kaiser if he's over there.

Finally we gits thru boats an' harbor and lands somewhere in France; didn't know where it was. Don't make no difference, 'cause we wus seein' dry land again, Lawd, Lawd.

So Boys gits cleaned up little and captains march 'em through streets on somewhere we don't know where we's going. But boys feelin' better, music tickle 'em up an' proud of marchin' manners. So they start struttin' like King of Africa, or sumpin' marchin' through streets, heads up, keepin' step an' listenin' to French folks hollerin' an' shoutin' 'bout big strong Americans comin' over. Boys thinkin' 'bout folks back home watchin' 'em, planning to tell 'em 'bout it when they gits back. This mo' like marchin' parade, but las' one we gonna be in together. Them marchin's days an' nights in rain an' mud an' shells ain't gonna have no music, neither will it be like parade. Boys don't know nothin' yet, pity po' boys never gonna git back again. Howsomever, we wus feelin' good, an' captains seem proud of black boys marchin' off somewhere, maybe singin' "Touchdown, Army, Touchdown, Army," or singin' old company song:

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Hail, hail to the twenty-steenth infantry,
Hail, hail to the twenty-steenth infantry,
Watch us as we pass by, watch us as we pass by;
We are always ready, our motto let it be,
Our country callin', twenty-steenth infantry,
Watch us as we pass by, as we pass by.

And so, like prayin' captain told us, every man got safe across waters. But Lawdy, Lawd, is they gonna git back? Well, I don't know, Lord, I don't know. War never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me.

II. No Hiding-Place

II

NO HIDING-PLACE

THOUGHT I had come to judgment day, first night I got caught up front near battle-line. 'Way off on one side big storm comin' up, black clouds risin', deep thunder rollin', bright lightnin' flashin'. On other side deep rumble an' flash of big guns like thunder an' lightnin' only mo' so. Crack of guns on one side sound like claps of thunder while peals of thunder on other side sound also like big growlin' guns. Then you see that forked lightning, then you hear that rollin' thunder. Shells go screamin' like movin' thunder and guns flash fire like scorchin' lightning. Shrapel fire rush 'cross black sky like ball lightnin' I seen one time in big storm, then bustin' like sheet o' lightning spreadin' all over God's heaven. Oh, my God, wished I wus in heaven settin' down.

I looked toward that Northern pole,
An' seed black clouds of fire roll;
Oh, lightnin' flashin' an' thunder rollin',
Oh, lightnin' flashin' an' thunder rollin',
Lord, I know my time ain't long.

WINGS ON MY FEET

Well, guess I wus tremblin' like leaf, yet I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. Nothin' to do 'bout it, goddam. I don't see no guns, I don't feel no bullets, jes' judgment day. Oh, Lord, wish I was in heaven settin' down. Rain begin to po', big guns gittin' nearer, shells bustin' 'round us. Oh, my Lord, wish I wus in heaven settin' down. But I ain't seen nothing like I'm gonna see. Whut wus I doin' there, how did I git out? I'll tell you 'bout it maybe, tell 'bout it maybe some day. War never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me.

'Bout that time wus big shell comin' over. I'm so skeered don't know whether my Lord passin' by or mo' like big freight train rollin' through black clouds. So I says to boys lyin' in deep muddy place, I been ridin' heap o' trains in my day, but don't believe I'm gonna flag that fast freight; I'm gonna ride them cushions to the promised land.

One o' these days 'bout twelve o'clock,
This ole worl' gonna reel an' rock,
I'm gonna leave, I'm gonna ride,
Six white hosses side by side.

Oh, my Lord, wished I wus in Georgia singin' chain-gang blues. But that don't do me no good, nothin' to do 'bout it, goddam. I'm wonderin', will

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I ever git home again. Sholy will tell 'em 'bout it, talk about it. Eve'ything I ever done come befo' me under same persimmon tree, come befo' me jes' like gourd vine. Talk about it; war an' me must 'a' been buddies 'scusin' why didn't shell git me? Big shell hit camp kitchen an' blowed big black cook from North Car'lina 'bout fifty feet; blowed him clean up in tree, then bus' open tree. Po' boy went to see his Jesus.

Oh, the green trees a bowin'
An' po' sinner stan' tremblin'
Well, trumpet sound in my soul,
An' I ain't got long to stay here.

'Nother shell bust up bank o' dirt behind me and shove me over in shell-hole; jes' 'bout cover me up. Dirt was what save me, dirt save me jes' like time blastin' fuse went off too soon in railroad tunnel, in sweet ole Tennessee.

Shells an' lightnin' make night look like day. Big guns belchin' hell-fire. Could see boys startin' an' fallin', trees bein' split an' busted, teams an' trucks runnin' like army of the Lord. Horses and men screamin' an' dyin', big guns boomin', big shells bustin'. Oh, my Lord, wished I was in heaven settin' down.

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Went down to rocks to hide my face,
Well, rocks cried out, "No hidin'-place."

Big ammunition dump 'bout half-mile from where
we wus startin' an' fallin', runnin' an' hidin'.
'Bout that time big shell hit dump an' look like
whole worl' comin' to end sho' 'nuf. After storm
was over I seen big black ship flyin' up there in
moonlight with black cross grinnin' down at sol-
diers. Jes' naturally ain't human, sho' look like
black demon witch devil, got us hoodooed. Oh, my
Lord, where was King Jesus ridin' storm? Seen
'nother plane come out an' fight with Heine, shells
screamin', plane burnin' up and fallin' screamin'
to ground, an' shells bustin' up ground where
French graveyard been. Oh, my Lord, could hear
my mother singing,

Then you see the world on fire,
Moon done turned to blood,
You see the elements meltin',
You see the stars a-fallin',
Then you see the coffins bustin',
Then you see the bones a-creepin',
Then you hear the tombstones crackin',
Then you see the graveyards bustin',
Earth shall reel an' totter,
Hell shall be uncapped.

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I never will forgit seein' dead soldiers risin' up. Sholy could see 'em when shells an' lightnin' flash. Sometimes would jes' move arms an' legs or maybe face, sometimes would jes' turn over. Seen one po' black boy been drivin' cashion team, settin' up there holdin' lines an' grinning jes' same as if he was livin'. Shell done got him an' team, too. Sho' look like ole Satan walkin' in this land. Soldiers with gas-masks slippin' round in shadows an' light look jes' prezacly like ghosts an' devils. Nex' day fields an' woods awful sight, many po' boys both colored an' white lyin' dead an' sleepin' on ground.

Well, war graveyard must be awful place,
Lay po' boy on his back, throw dirt in his face;
White hosses dead at head o' the branch,
Black crows whistle, buzzards dance,
Oh, my Lord, I ain't got long to stay here.

Thought I seen plenty o' ghosts some other times also. Sometimes at night when we have to fix wires or bridges or marchin' in woods, could see 'em slippin' from tree to tree or white mists shinin' like spirits ha'ntin' the promised land. Sometimes could see 'em driving team of white and black horses, movin' 'bout so easy couldn't hear 'em, but eyes shinin' an' out of their mouths come fire an' smoke. Sometime we be diggin' trenches at night and we see

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ghosts diggin' jes' like natural men. We think must be buddies already died after we find out they ain't natural. One time I'm sho' I seen whole company dead buddies standin' up callin' us to help 'em out. Oh, my Lord, wished I was in Georgia singin' jail-house blues.

Other times, when we wus passin' through deserted French village or stayin' in farmhouses, seen ghosts of both German an' French soldiers movin' 'bout, shadows creepin' from white house to black cellars. Seen green lights an' white flashes like spirits being carried up to heaven. Big black bats floppin' like devils with wings an' horns an' tails. Ain't no use tellin' me ain't no ghosts; I seen 'em, what you read about in mystery books I can tell you 'bout an' mo', 'cause I was there. An' one ghost sho' did tell me 'bout how buddy of mine got murdered over in United States, an' I swear I'm gonna git that dam' scoundrel if las' thing I do when I git back.

'Nuther thing make war an' battle look like judgment day wus fact of all sorts an' kinds o' folks from all over world comin' together, talkin' an' fightin' an' mixin' like goddam. Seen folks from all over distant lands. Gonna tell folks back home.

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Seem like I been travelin' all over world. Been travelin' man, sho' God travelin' now.

I seen big black Africans, never seen no black men like 'em. I seen brown boys an' black, say they come from Australia. Some say come from Arabia, look like tigers, crooked fightin' knives like tiger's claws. Seen some soldiers look like Indians an' seen mo' boys look like must been Pharaoh's army. Guess didn't all of 'em git drowned, Lawdy, Mary don't you weep no mo'. Seen Belgians an' funny-lookin' Scotch fellows, Irish, an' yellow Chinese with eyes like snake, an' funny little Japanese. 'Scusin' also I seen all sorts an' kinds in American army from New York an' other places an' some German prisoners an' some others don't know who they was. I disremembers all folks I seen. Howsomever, seem like God done call them children from distant lands.

Big black boys sho' could work an' could fight too. Seen 'em stretchin' 'selves heap o' time. Look like crowd back home workin' in camps, only look different, too. You oughta seen crowd black boys from Africa or Australia or some place workin' side by side with black boys come from United States. Big black boys, white teeth an' white eyes, skins shinin' black, steamin' in sun an' rain, big

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iron muscles standin' out. Good-God-a-mighty, watch 'em work, watch 'em dig, watch 'em sing, watch 'em talk an' joree, an' watch 'em cryin' for lovin' mama or maybe lovin' baby back home.

Seen one big black boy drivin' team black hosses. One of 'em wus screamin' stallion, white sweat an' red blood runnin' down. Oh, my Lord, black men, black hosses, black war, maybe black God, I don't know; Lord, I don't know.

One time when I was in French village I run across big black nigger come from Zululand or somewhere. Never seen such cu'i'us-lookin' big boy, heap bigger'n I was. Leastwise I been off few days an' had alcohol behind my eyes an' wus 'bout fohty wid brakes on. So when I sees this fellow jes' naturally make me want to fight, jes' make me want to go up an' slap his face like Brer Rabbit hit tar man. So I goes over to this big boy an' says, "Howdy, big boy, howdy, me an' you an' war same things, ain't we, goddam?" He don't say nothin' an' I wus jes' rarin' back gonna tell him howdy sho' 'nuf when I seen he's grinnin' an' signifyin' he don't know what I been sayin'. So we becomes buddies and takes in town together, Lawdy, Lawd.

Boys said they heard tell 'bout one big African

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chief had more'n eight hundred children, more'n three hundred fifty boys an' 'bout fo' hundred girls. Lawdy, Lawd, wa'n't he a lovin' daddy? Thought I remember hearin' my mama's papa tellin' 'bout one fightin' chief killed all his children 'cause he's skeered some of 'em might grow up and take his crown 'way from him. He wa'n't free, Lawd, he wa'n't free, setting down in the kingdom. He ain't got nothin' on me. Ain't gonna ketch me worryin' 'bout keepin' no starry crown.

When I die, jes' bury me good an' deep
Big bottle booze right at my feet,
Black cat dices in my hand,
Throw seven an' 'leven in promised land.

Thought I was sorry for heap o' white buddies I seen in war. Young boys ain't 'customed to walkin' in rain an' mud, day an' night, trampin' all over face of earth. Don't know nothin' 'bout not eatin' an' sleepin' an' bein' po' boys long way from home like I does. Also mos' white soldiers has to go up front in fightin' units more'n I did. Feel sorry for 'em when they comes back, 'scusin' heap of 'em don't never git back. See 'em comin' back after battle, sore feet, can't walk, all gassed up, have to lean on one 'nother. Seen 'em cryin' an' laughin' an' cussin', look pitiful like. Faces show trouble heap

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more'n face of black boys. Po' boys look pale an' like nearly dead, lines in faces an' beards all dirty, eyes all sunk in, clothes all muddy an' full o' blood. Look like they jes' 'bout gone, hungry, mad, skeered, homesick, all come befo' war jes' like gourd vine.

Some come crippled, some come lame,
Some come speakin' of Moses' name,
Old dry bones gonna rise again.

White buddies mighty funny, too, sometimes. Sometimes we sorry for 'em, sometimes we jes' have to laugh at 'em. Sometimes we don't keer if some white boys, meaner'n devil, have hard time, Lawd, we don't keer, Lawd we don't keer. Been treatin' us wrong, been hard on colored soldiers. White man been fightin' colored man. Now fightin' 'selves. Sometimes we jes' naturally makin' trouble with 'em. Sometimes when we see big white boy skeered we snicker at 'im, he look so funny an' white. Some boys take it mighty hard. Howsomever, heap of 'em mighty hard boiled, can cuss mo', fight mo', drink mo' than colored boys. Ain't got no respects for nothin'. Ain't skeered of nothin'. Run right straight into German guns, stormin' machine-gun nests, Heines shootin' an' chargin' like whole German army.

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Well, never seen like since I been born,
Jerries keep a-comin', buddies done gone.

Big white boys from mountains look skeered an' don't look skeered neither. Jes' starin' at nothin' an' sayin' nothin'. Never been nowhere much an' never seen country like I has. Boys laugh at 'em 'cause didn't want salute officers. Colored soldiers salutin' all time. Told me mountain boys make mighty good soldiers, howsomever, not knowin' what war is about. Neither does I, neither my buddies.

Goin' up to war to git fine clothes
What war's about nobody knows.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

'All same to us. Me an' war same thing. Don't like it, don't know if I dislikes it, can't help it, nothin' to do about it. Well, it's rainin' here, but its stormin' on the sea. Boys settin' round waitin' for orders. Maybe skeered, maybe not. Don't show how they feels, maybe don't know theyselves. Joreein' one 'nother.

See feller over there look like he's homesick wid sinkin' blues, holler at him, "Hey, all that nigger lookin' fer is fat meat an' sundown."

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"Dam' lie, all he lookin' fer is cornbread an' sunup."

"Well, ole strumpet, that's all right, blues ain't nothin' but good man feelin' bad."

" 'Nuther lie, blues ain't nuthin' but woman on po' man's mind."

Boys git to playin' with sticks an' bugs, maybe with spider on ground, an' start singin' all of sudden:

Oh, bitin' spider, don't bite me,
Lawdy, bitin' spider, don't bite me.

Heap o' funny things happen and heap mo' sad ones, take me till to-morrow night to tell 'bout 'em. 'Bout funniest thing I seen, ain't funny neither, was time some buddies was out patrollin', crawlin' on bellies like snake or sumpin', an' with orders to fix up wires. Well, they got past some German officers, an' one boy crawl right smack into German officers crawlin' same way. Oughta heard him yell. We couldn't go back an' we couldn't run, 'cause we's already behind Germans, so we had to do something. Germans thought 'cause we wus behind 'em an' hollerin' like devils, must be heap of us. Thought we shot 'bout three. So we got 'em skeered and cap'n sent squad to help us an' we captured officers an' took 'em in.

After we got in camp an' light, one German officer sees me an' also recognizes my voice an' hollers, "What hell you doin' over here?"

So I says, "What hell you doin' yo'self; I'm fightin' fer Uncle Sam."

Sho' wus funny. This fellow was boy worked in same factory over in New Jersey where I did befo' war. Said he had to go to Germany to help his parents with some property, an' Germans conscript him befo' he could git away. Never did see him no mo' an' don't know what 'come of him to this day. Maybe war got him, didn't git me. He's big captain an' I'm high private in rear rank, but I gits there just the same.

Heap o' heart-breakin' things happen too. Can't count 'em. One time we wus marchin' along and buddy got killed an' nobody never did know whut hit him. Got blowed up someway, never could find out what sort bullet or shell struck 'im. 'Nother buddy worked in French town an' family of French captain. Thought he was very fond of little child of French captain who been killed in war. One day Germans captured place an' took house where French family wus an' set up lines 'gainst American army.

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This buddy so worried in his mind 'bout little child gettin' hurt by Germans he jes' naturally went mad an' stormed out wid knife an' flyin' devil grenade, gonna blow Germans into promised land an' git little child. Germans got him, blowed him clean to pieces. Wa'n't necessary for him to go but nobody couldn't tell him nothin'. He wus gonna save little child. And so he gave his life for little French child. Made me very sad an' I kept hollerin', "Say, Buddy, is you hurt, is you killed?" Knowed he wus but jes' kept hollerin' to him.

'Nother sad time I recollects was when white captain from home town where my mother lived was brought back from lines wounded. They said he won big fight leadin' boys up big hill. But Jerries got him. He wus good friend to me, always helpin' me out o' trouble if I needed it. Seen me an' ask me wouldn't I go see his mother when I got back home. I told him I sholy would but mighty hard thing to do. War got him, never got me.

Funny thing 'bout this white captain. Fust time I ever heard 'bout France, heard his mama tellin' my mama 'bout her an' young husband gonna make trip to study. He wus young professor in college town, teachin' French. Young wife mighty foolish 'bout him an' always savin' an' scrapin' up eve'-

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thing so they could make trip to France. Made it hard on my mama who wus workin' for 'em. This lady so set on husband an' trip made it hard on mama. She was gettin' house ready to go abroad, curtains an' everything makin' laundry mighty heavy for 'bout five weeks. Kept my mama workin' hard to help. One of my brothers wus born Friday night an' mama so eager to help white lady get off she set up in bed nex' day an' iron las' things so she could send 'em back. White woman didn't send her nothin' for pay 'cept bundle of ole rags an' jar o' mutton tallow. Lady on her way to France, po' mama needin' doctor an' ain't got no money. Hurt mama's feelin's an' never forgit hearin' her tell 'bout it.

Never would 'a' thought I be havin' name of soldier in France an' son of white lady be killed an' me takin' back word to his mama. My mama done dead an' gone sleepin' in grave, nobody to carry my troubles to. His mama fine old lady eve'ybody love, always sayin' fine things 'bout my mama. War got only son she had, never got me, neither none of my brothers. All come under same gourd vine in big war. Thought me an' war must be buddies from 'way back.

I got rainbow tied round my shoulder
Wings hitched on my feet.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

III. This Old World's Rollin' On

III

THIS OLD WORLD'S ROLLIN' ON

BEEN mighty change since I been born. Change where I been but ain't change me. I remembers hearin' my mama's papa, fine, ole, gray-haired colored man, tellin' 'bout bloody fightin' tribes of Africa. Fightin' one 'nother, fightin' white folks tryin' to run 'em off or comin' to take slaves. Now here I is, side by side with black soldiers from Africa, fightin' with white man 'gainst 'nuther white man. Neither is I in Africa where my mama's papa come from, neither in America where I was born. Neither is I fightin' white man, neither white man fightin' me. Maybe I'm fightin' white folks. They tell me Germans is white. Well I don't know, Lord, I don't know. An' white folks been fightin' my people ever since I been born. War an' me same thing. I'm jes' natchel magic black boy, rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.

My grandfather was good story-teller. Could make us see things he seen. Seem jes' like I been in Africa an' seen things his papa told him 'bout. Been fightin' with crooked knives, been shootin' poison

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arrows, been huntin' lions an' tigers, been drinkin' blood an' prayin' to thunder upon moon mountains or snake gods of Africa. Me an' Africans buddies, me an' war buddies. I been fightin' as boy, I been fightin' ever since. I'm African chief, I'm travelin' man, I'm in American Expliditiary Force, naming name of soldier. I'm last week an' next Sunday. Yet I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. War never got me, never will.

The ole worl's rollin', rollin', rollin',
Well, I got on my travelin' shoes,
Some o' these mornin's bright an' fair,
Gonna hitch my wings an' try the air,
Death is in this land.

My mother's father was Uncle Simon Mackey, lived in house give him by Jedge Sanders long time ago. House was near creek an' at foot of big hill-side with big trees, grove of hickories an' oaks. Us children played like creek was African river an' trees, an' hill big African mountain an' forests. So we had armies an' fightin' an' all other things old man told us 'bout in Africa. Thought about it heap o' times since I lef' my mother's home.

When I seen big Africans in France in army, thought about it. When I seen little black Alge-

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rians with crooked knives in mouths, an' sharp bayonets in their hands, hollerin' an' fightin' an' killin' every prisoner they capture, thought about it. When we git in close place, maybe unloadin' from truck on ammunition dump, shells bustin', blood smellin', thought about it, Lawd, Lawd, thought about it. When I seen po' French women an' children an' old men runnin' 'way from captured towns, thought 'bout big treks in Africa grandpapa's papa told him 'bout. When I seen white M. P.'s string up colored soldier an' fill him full o' bullets, Lawd, Lawd, thought about it. An' thought about all them other fights I been in myself. Lawd, Lawd, don't you grieve after me.

I'm soldier in the army of the Lord,
I'm soldier in the army of the Lord,
My mother was soldier in the army of the Lord,
I 'specs to live an' die in army of the Lord.

When I was little boy my mother went to live with her father. Reason we went to live with grandparents was my mother couldn't stand fightin' an' abusin' which her old man kep' givin' her an' so she laid his po' body down with fohty-fo'. Seen 'em fightin' ever since I been born. Seen 'em put my father on coolin' board. My mama mighty

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good fighter but tears falling to the floor. So we stayed with grandparents an' heard heap o' stories.

Mama's father was slave an' his father also, both being brought over on ship when he was very young. He never seen all things he told us 'bout, but his father told him 'bout 'em, an' he was good story-teller too. We would listen an' never tire. Told us 'bout fierce battles. Chiefs so terrible make tigers tremble. One chief so fierce would punish men didn't obey him by stringin' 'em up on stakes an' leavin' 'em alive for hyenas to git. Sometimes would kill enemy an' eat 'em. Thought fierce peoples an' tribes sprung from this chief. Would die smilin', would drink fresh blood of wild boar. Maybe I'm one, all same to me, used to tell boys I wus. Black men would fight like devils. When I seen bayonets in army an' 'way Algerian Colonial soldiers sharpened an' bent 'em, thought 'bout them cuttin' an' stabbin' knives old man told us 'bout. Called 'em assegi or sumpin'. When I seen poison gas, thought about them poison arrers told me 'bout. Jerries ain't got nothin' on old African chiefs. This ole world's rollin', rollin'. Death is in this land.

Thought he told us 'bout army fightin' in shape of big steer's horns. Would march forward like

bellerin' bull wid head down an' close in with knives an' stabbin' weapons like bull gorin' enemy. Would march round an' round in blind frenzied rage like mad dog. Men knowed they had to fight; if didn't would be killed by enemy, if didn't would be killed by chiefs. Got to fight if they live, only lives if they fight. Sometimes got to die if they fight, got to die if they don't fight.

Some African armies wonder of worl'. Nothin' like 'em, goddam. Would dress up in shinin' colors, and march an' sing an' dance an' fight. Told us they butcher enemy jes' like hogs on hog-killin' day in Mississippi. Squealin' don't do 'em no good, would stab 'em in throat an' heart. Don't give 'em no quarter neither would they stop singin' an' hollerin'. Jes' natchel born black warrers. Thought I could see 'em myself. Would trick enemy in all sorts o' ways. Would send little army 'long one way an' make enemy come marchin' after 'em, then big army would be up on big hill an' roll down big rocks on 'em. Would go on island in big river an' enemy couldn't git at 'em 'cause had under-water pass nobody else knowed about. Had codes an' language, an' my mama's papa could name 'em good to us. Snake gods in woods an' storms give black man magic.

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Some chiefs had magic power. Nobody couldn't hurt 'em. Would stand out an' say, "Here I is, why don't somebody shoot me with poison arrer or cut me with knife or sumpin'?" Nobody couldn't touch 'em. Arrers bend an' break, bullets roll off of 'em, knives bend back double. Thought one big chief got magic man skeered and battin' his eyes an' shot him right straight in eye. Laid his po' body down. Ain't got nothin' on me, rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.

Well, when I was boy got in heap trouble marchin' an' fightin' like Africans. Me an' war same thing. One time got crowd boys an' went up on big hill and toted rocks an' piled 'em up for two-three days. Laid 'em out all 'long hilltop. Then we got some big boys to come 'long down creek at bottom of hill, an' rolled big rocks down on 'em, hollerin' an' yellin'. Never seed like since I been born. Sho' got my britches patched an' my mutton pulled for doin' this meanness.

Would march roun' beatin' tin cans and carryin' sticks and any old knives we could git. Dress up in all sorts an' kinds o' clothes an' try to look like African soldiers. Guess was good thing we had to go to work soon, leastwise don't know what I wouldn't

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'a' done. Got worse an' worse. One day took an' stole big pistol from my brother an' sho' did raise hell. Played African chief an' desperado Bill all same time. Seem like I jes' boun' to do sumpin' dirty all time. Went round singin':

Shoot my pistol in yo' face,
Lonesome graveyard yo' restin'-place.

I was sort o' high brown boy myself, darker than my father, an' mama she was darker than me. Never did know much 'bout my father. Wus high yaller, maybe blue-vein nigger. Come from city. Nobody never knowed much 'bout him. Was bad egg. I was good fighter from beginnin' an' nois'est rascal anybody ever seen. Still, I keeps in good humor with white folks, makin' 'em laugh at my jokes an' antics. Been doin' that ever since; also been fightin' all my days.

Feel my hell a-risin',
Risin' six feet a day,
If it keep on risin',
Gonna wash this worl' away.

Seen my mama hold her own many times fightin' wid old man. I been under bed watchin' 'em, skeered like rabbit, still I was proud of way mama

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fight when she have to do it. She wus sho' some magic lady herself. I'm tellin' you she was match for that dam' rascal when she git started good. He always come home an' start something. Mama try to keep peace. Wus fine lady an' thought heap us children. But she couldn't stop him an' fust thing they knowed wus fightin' like cats an' dogs. Sometimes when ole man git through fightin' wouldn't have much left on him but his skin an' it be badly ruffed up. Reason they quit fightin' wus so wore out couldn't hardly stand up.

One night ole man come in drunk an' went to beat-in' mama and started to hunt gun an' said he wus gonna shoot her. So she beat him to it an' laid his po' body down. She hate to do it but ain't nothin' else to do. So she can do whatever she have to do, so she takes baby in one arm an' smokin' fohty-fo' in other and gives herself up to Law.

Mama wus good lady an' eve'ybody knowed it. So jedge an' jury set her free an' tole her to go, all white folks an' colored folks too bein' witnesses for my mama. Whatever she have to do she could do, don't know nothin' 'bout stoppin' till she's done. Neither does I, only I'm heap mo' ramblin' than my mama. Always some other place better than

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this, sumpin' else callin' me on, nothin' but myself
an' my feelin's, Lawd, Lawd, rainbow round my
shoulder, wings on my feet.

If I feel to-morrow like I feel to-day,
Good God, gonna pack my kit an' walk away.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

My mama's papa told us heap other things 'bout
where he come from. Could remember comin' over
on boat with his father. Was very small boy but
thought he could remember sharks an' mermaids,
Thought about him when I was crossin' wide ocean,
time captain thought he saw submaroon an' shot
at Pampas fish. He was po' little boy long way
from home, tied down in ship an' beat if he cried.
I'm American all dressed up naming name of sol-
dier, goin' cross singin' "Touchdown, Army, Touch-
down, Army." This ole world's rollin', rollin'. Been
mighty change since I been born.

But what I was 'bout to tell 'bout was my mama's
papa told us so many pretty things 'bout Africa
made me homesick, neither had I ever been there.
I disremembers all things he told us, but some of
'em I can think of. Told us 'bout gleamin' hot sands
an' cool veld dips, an' red land. Oh, my Lawd, could
smell dirt. Told us 'bout bein' deep in jungles an'

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high over blue mountaintops. Told us 'bout dark jungles an' black magic an' mystery an' feasts and worshipin' an' lovin' in name of snake gods an' storm-clouds. Eatin' an' drinkin' an' dancin', Lawdy, Lawd, must 'a' had big times, talk about it. When I been to New York an' Harlam an' seen goin's-on, thought about it, Lord, thought about it.

Thought he told us 'bout wild animals in deep swamps an' big woods. All sorts an' kinds. Big creepin' snakes, big as log swimmin' in river or curlin' up in green tree or maybe slippin' an' slidin' on ground. Gonna git some animals or sumpin', or maybe black boy git in his way. Lions an' tigers boys would hunt. Maybe sometimes roarin' lion or screamin' tiger would ketch fellow. Would tear 'em an' break bones like wus pig or goat or sumpin'. Wus elephants and geeraffes an' rhinoceroes gruntin' like big swamp hogs an' fightin' mo' fiercer than razor-back boar hemmed up in Georgia piney woods. 'Scusin' they don't get killed seem like huntin' an' fightin make negro mo' shrewder an' mo' swifter than white man.

Howsomever, seem like white man mo' swifter or crueler or sumpin'. Heard him tell 'bout way white man captured slaves an' tie 'em to stakes an' in bot-

THIS OLD WORLD'S ROLLIN' ON

tom of boats an' beat 'em. Heard same thing 'bout slaves in his day. I seen mob after negro. I been near by in race riot. Been mighty change since I been born; ain't change me, ain't change me. Ain't no time, ain't no place, ain't nothin' but myself an' my feelin's. Nothin' but me an' world an' war. Me an' war is buddies. I'm leavin' here walkin' an' talkin' to myself, won't be satisfied here an' nowhere I go.

Make me think of big billy-goat I seen one time. Kep' buttin' fence, couldn't git out. Look like he butt 'cause he jes' love to butt. Maybe he butt cause he jes' couldn't help it. Would butt a while, then eat a while. Leastwise kep' buttin' till he got out an' went tearin' off bleatin' an' smellin' like goddam.

Well, yellor girl make houn' dog quit his trail;
Black girl make a tadpole hug a whale;
My dark-skinned baby make preacher lay his Bible down;
An' long, lean, lanky girl make a billy-goat butt a lion.

IV. I Feel Like a Feather in the Air

IV

I FEEL LIKE A FEATHER IN THE AIR

ONE day when we was goin' out 'cross battle-field I seen buddy pick up big fountain pen, shoutin', "Lawd, boys, gonna write to my sweet mama this night, gonna ask is she got my bath water on." So he starts to unscrew fountain pen an' next thing we seen was pieces of boy flyin' in all directions.

I ain't *never* gonna have no fountain pen. One time boy give me one but I ain't gonna keep it. Every time I start openin' it up see po' buddy cryin' out. Seen him one night comin' in askin' me if he open up pen wrong way an' won't I show him right way. Oh, my Lord, ain't gonna ketch me usin' no fountain pen if I never gits to write no mo'.

'Nother thing war done for me gonna stay with me till I die. Never can set down in big easy cheer, no matter where I sees it. Reason why I tell you so. One day we marched into town where Heines jes' left. Had mines an' potato mashers an' every kind devil thing ketch boys. Well, we had fine big black boy, cook most of time, sholy did love to set down.

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Jes' *had* to set down wherever he go. So we seen big soft cheer left in dugout and boy seen it. All boys holler at him to hold on, cheer might be loaded, don't set down in it. He says he *gonna* set down in it. So we hollers to hold on minute till we gits out of way. Never did find pieces of that big boy, look like railroad track blowed up or sumpin'. Thought I could see po' boy comin' to set down in big cheer, *wants* to set down, still he's *afraid* to set down, look like he's askin' why *can't* he set down.

Thought 'bout fine black feller my mama's papa told us 'bout in war with Yankees back in old days. Way it wus told to me, wus jes' after war with Yankees, sumpin' always wrong with hosses an' mules in big barn belongin' to Colonel Sanders I told you 'bout give home to my mama's papa and mama. Like I'm tellin' you he was Old Massa to my mama's parents and wus mighty good to them. Howsomever they been heap better to him ever since they been born.

Like I was sayin', few years after war every night stock would git out of barn an' next mornin' was so tired from runnin' old Colonel thought maybe somebody wus drivin' 'em out. Well, he sent my mama's brother one night to watch an' see what

LIKE A FEATHER IN THE AIR

was gonna happen. By an' by jes' as he was dozin' off, in come big black feller floatin' round an' round, an' ever do' in barn flew wide open. He jes' floated in an' them mules an' hosses jes' nachely come out o' there, tails in the air, an' runnin' like judgment day. Right down to big creek an' swamp big black boy drove 'em. Mama's brother yelled an' run round tryin' to stop 'em. Big black boy don't see him, don't keer nothin' for him, floatin' first on one side of hosses an' then on other.

Well, come on, brother, goin' over this wall,
Don't want to stumble, an' don't want to fall.
Lord, I'm on my way an' can't turn back.

Well, my uncle goes tearin' to house an' tells old Colonel 'bout what he seen. Old Colonel jumps up an' says, "Hell an' tarnation, that sholy is Big Joseph." Colonel seem powerful grieved, tears runnin' down his face. Told 'bout time Yankees come through country an' everybody hidin' things out. Some would hide 'em in swamps and some in woods an' gullies and some in rocks. Would hide silver an' meat an' cotton an' eve'ything could git out of way of marchin' Yankee soldiers.

Way it wus, when time come for old Colonel to go off to war he calls Big Joseph. Some called him Uncle

Joe but old Colonel always called him Big Joseph which he liked very much. So Colonel tells him he's got to go to war an' says he knows Big Joseph is best man on place an' loves old Mistis an' children. Says he knows he can trust him to take keer of folks whilst he's gone. Still, he asks him can he 'pend on him. So Uncle Joe tells him he sholy can trust him to stand by Mistis an' family if last thing he ever do.

When Yankees wus comin' near, Uncle Joe took all stock way off down in cane brake by creek an' hid 'em. Big Joseph come on back an' was settin' round place when Yankees come up. They say to him they knows he done hid stock an' he gotta tell 'em where they is.

He don't move neither does he say anything. So one soldier kicks him an' says if he don't tell where he hid stock he's gonna burn his clothes off'n him, an' maybe shoot him.

Still Big Joseph don't move neither does he open his mouth. So soldier hits him with gun over head an' kicks him 'nuther time, an' calls in mo' soldiers an' say gonna shoot him if he don't tell 'em where he hid stock.

Howsomever, still he don't move, neither does he tell 'em where he drove 'em to. So one soldier shot him right through heart an' laid his po' body down. Was mighty sorrowful. So Big Joseph done whut he told Colonel he would do. Standin' by family wus last thing he ever done, 'scusin' his spirit still tryin' to save stock for old Colonel.

Well, after this old Colonel started buildin' new barn on other side of big road, an' so after it wus finished would always fill old barn with hay and plows an' keep stock in new barn. So after that po' old Uncle Joseph wanders round every night lookin' fer mules an' stock. Whilst they be sound asleep in new barn.

Thought about it heap o' times. Funny how ever-thing I do in war make me think 'bout sumpin' I already done or heard, or 'bout what I'm gonna tell folks when I git back home. Been hearin' 'bout war ever since I been born. Heap colored folks back in war with Yankees like po' Joseph. Yankees couldn't make 'em tell where they hid things. Wus like I is an' like I say 'bout my mama, could do anything they had to do. Could fight if they had to fight, could die if they had to die. Jes' couldn't make 'em tell. Sometimes would tie 'em up, some-

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times would beat 'em, sometimes would kill 'em. War got Big Joseph, never got me.

Heard heap stories 'bout war with Yankees an' colored folks standin' by white folks, women an' old men left at home. Funny how colored man can do whatever he has to do, can fight in Africa, can stand by captain, can fight in army against Jerries. Thought they told me 'bout one time big high yeller nigger an' his wife murdered one good old mis-sus whilst menfolks gone to war. This nigger always wus mean nigger an' none of colored folks would have nothin' to do with him. So one day he plans to cut throat of fine old lady. So when she gits on horse an' rides over plantation jes' like man, tryin' to keep things goin', this big nigger stops her an' knocks her off horse. Then he gits skeered an' starts to run.

'Bout that time his wife comes up an' says to him he's big yeller coward ain't gonna kill no white woman, ain't nothin' but skunk nohow. So he drags white lady off and kills her an' throws her over bank of river an' goes back home.

So was one old white gentleman in community set his suspicions on this yeller nigger and set trap to

ketch him. So he had all colored folks together, talkin' an' goin' on and he was watchin' to see if he could find out anything. So he couldn't tell nothin' 'bout it an' keeps tryin' things. So he tries 'nother plan. He makes all colored men take sack wheat on shoulders an' climb up steep stairway, 'bout all could do to tote sack up. So he thinks if any one these niggers kilt po' Missus he sho' gonna be trembly when he's climbin' up them stairs.

So sho' 'nuf this big nigger gits so trembly an' can't hardly carry his sack up, an' old captain holler at him an' he drops bag an' starts runnin'. Sholy thought they had him. So captain takes him 'long and makes him follow where Missus rode that mornin' all time he's swearin' he ain't never seen her. Captain mighty hard on him an' when he find where Missus' hoss stop, takes this nigger an' walks him round. Nigger says that's all right he knows they ain't gonna find nothin'. 'Cause he thinks he done throwed Missus in river wid rock tied round her arms.

Howsomever, when he throwed lady over she caught in bushes way down near water and so they found her an' brought big nigger back. 'Bout hundred colored folks on place took nigger an' wus

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gonna kill him, only old white gentleman told 'em to let him take him over to Law at county-seat. So that was the end of that high yell.

When I seen po' French women an' old men an' children beggin' colored soldiers in France for scraps, thought about hard times folks had, both colored an' white, my mama told us 'bout after war with Yankees. Colored soldiers always *would* give po' French anything had. So I thought 'bout it, Lawd, thought 'bout it an' one day I knocked big sassy black cook in head an' took whole lot stuff from camp kitchen an' give po' French lady an' little starvin' children. Made me do kitchen police but I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet.

I was born fo' thousand years ago,
Ain't nothin' happened I don't know
Seen old Satan cuss Adam sore
Seen old Adam holler for more.

Said Germans gonna be mighty mean an' tricky. Sholy wus. 'Scusin' by an' by American side little mo' swifter. Like I was tellin' 'bout, would trick boys with watches, fountain pens, cheers and set mines on to piano in officers' dugout so first boy settin' down gonna play them homesick blues get

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blowed into promised land, gonna wake up in heaven or hell one, they don't keer which.

Howsomever, heard my mama tell 'bout Yankee soldiers doin' all sorts an' kinda things to po' women an' children. Been hearin' 'bout war all my day, been soldier in army of Lord, been bad man, bad as hell, I know. French folks don't hate Jerries, howsomever, like old Colonel Sanders an' other big white folks my mama told me 'bout hate Yankees. Sholy did hate 'em like goddam. Would swear to children they got to swear their children never speak to dam' Yankee long as they live. Sholy did hate an' fight 'em, Lawdy, Lawd.

Seein' little French white girl make me think 'bout little rockin'-cheer my mama's mama told us 'bout, when we lived with grandparents an' would tell us heap o' stories. It was told to me this way. Wus a lot of Yankee soldiers from North on picket duty round old Colonel Sanders' house. Well, wus one soldier sholy wus grand feller, wus mos' handsome soldier anybody ever seen. Little Miss, my grandma call her little Missus, wus daughter of Colonel Sanders. My mama said told her sho' wus prettiest white girl anybody ever seen.

Well, one night old Colonel steals in from 'Federate

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lines an' find little Missus in Yankee soldier's arms down in cedar lane. Oh, my Lord, old Colonel so mad he was turrible man, folks never seen him like that befo', neither since.

So he told my mama's mama, she wus slave in Colonel's family, she got to take little Missus and never let her get out of her sight. Got to watch her both day an' night, Sunday an' week day all same. So 'bout that time my mama's brother brung a long love-letter from that picket boy to little Missus an' Yankees moved farther up road somewhere. Nobody knows where they went, neither whether they be comin' back. So little Missus thought she never would see soldier boy again.

So my mama's mama brings best rockin'-cheer they got an fixes up little Missus best she could. So she jes' rock an' cry and rock an' cry till look like King Jesus don't have no mercy on her. She think po' picket soldier done gone an' got killed. Folks can't make her eat an' sleep, neither will she go anywhere.

So after war is over northern soldier comes back an' asks Colonel could he marry little Missus. Says he's good man an' will take good keer of her an'

powerful foolish 'bout her. Colonel don't do nuthin' but call him dam' skunk, an' tells him his daughter thinks same thing. Wus so mad nearly lose all his manners an' hit boy in big house, an' run him off. 'Co'se little Missus don't think no sich thing, but old Colonel so mad he clean 'side hisself.

So northern boy goes off an' when po' little Missus finds out her Yankee soldier boy done been back to see her an' her papa ain't tell her nothin' 'bout it, likewise drives him off, she jes' quits laffin', an' quits eatin' an' cain't sleep. She neither smiles, neither talks. She gits little whiter an' whiter an' sadder an' sadder. She so purty, look like purty white angel settin' an' rockin' an' starin' out in field.

Well, one day they jes' picks her up to carry her in room to bed an' she say she can't stay here no longer. She's gonna wait up in starry heaven for her northern soldier boy. So she jes' passes out, smilin' like angel an' old Colonel wa'n't never same no mo'. Near'bout killed him too.

Well, there set little rocker where she lef' it. An' ever' night all night long little Missus comes back an' rocks an' rocks. Cheer keeps on rockin' ever'

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night all night an' little Missus mo' whiter than be-fo', settin' an' rockin' an' lookin' out over white cotton-fiel' in moonlight.

Well, after 'mancipation, my mama's mama went to live in little house near by an' she took little rocker 'long. She was skeered of it neither could she let anybody else have it. So every night cheer would rock an' rock an' rest of family git mighty tired of cheer an' skeered of it. So one day white woman comes 'long an' say cheer wus worth maybe five dollars. So they sold cheer to white lady collectin' fine things from big house. So family was glad an' my grandmother was sad an' grieved in her mind.

So 'bout two days pass an' white lady drives up an' brings that cheer back, say she don't want it, folks can keep money but she don't want that cheer. So they asks her why she don't want it an' she tells 'em it rocks all night an' she jes' nachelly don't want it. So they takes it back.

Well, 'bout that time house they wus livin' in caught fire one night an' mos' everything got burnt up but saved few things. Part of rocking-cheer never did burn up and so they takes it to other house, one they lived in when my mama went to

live with her parents like I was tellin' 'bout. Told me wus actual fact, very first night, long 'bout midnight over in middle of room was little Missus, like purty white angel settin' an' rockin' an' lookin' out in moonlight an' groves o' trees. My mama say last thing her mama say befo' she died, wus she knows when she gits over Jordan she sholy will find little Missus rockin' an' waitin' for her, leastwise lessn'n she done found han'some Yankee soldier she been waitin' for.

War an' devil sho' same things. Nothin' to do 'bout it, goddam. I can do what I have to do. Me an' war bound to be buddies, leastwise why didn't war git me? War got little Missus, won't git me. I'm magic black man, rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.

I seen old Noah when he built the ark,
'Cause I wus creepin' round there in the dark,
I seen old Jonah swallow the whale,
An' I myself pulled lion's tail,
I've sailed all over Canaan on a log.

V. Down Don't Worry Me

V

DOWN DON'T WORRY ME

MAYBE one reason I don't git no mo' excited 'bout goin' to war than I does is because I seen heap of trouble in my day an' likewise many bloody killin's. Like I was sayin' I can do what I have to do an' me an' war sholy must be buddies, leastwise why ain't no bullets, neither shells, got my number on 'em? I seen heap o' heart-breakin' things in war, but I been seein' 'em ever since I been born.

Lord, I been down so long,
Down don't worry me.

One of first times I run off from home when I was boy, heard about big race riot, white folks beatin' an' shootin' colored folks. Look like some kind o' war sho' as hell. Crowd caught little colored boy an' made him jump off high viaduct bridge over railroad track. Told me po' boy's eyes nearly pop out like skeered rabbit an' he beg 'em not to do it. Says he ain't done nothing to white folks. Don't make no difference. They kills him jes' like kill rabbit.

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Crowd went on out in colored section close to white folks' houses. One old colored man wus crippled an' couldn't git 'way when they told him to leave. Begged white folks not to kill him. Shot him jes' like snake or mad dog or varmint or sumpin'. Been thinkin' 'bout it since I been in this war. Ain't seen no Heines meaner'n that. Me an' war same things.

The Lord give me trumpet an' told me to blow,
He give me a commission an' told me to go,
Gonna lay down my life for my Lord.

'Nother sight I never forgit till I die. Wus this way. Wus white man owned big plantation near by where I wus workin' when I was boy, 'nother time I was ramblin' round. Had 'bout hundred, maybe two hundred colored men workin' for him. Rice birds flyin' so thick captain got big crowd boys to shoot 'em like regular army. Would have 'bout fifty boys with guns an' others would skeer 'em up an' carry bags full o' birds. Would shoot other birds an' things also sometimes.

Well, that evenin' when all boys come in and stand-in' round big captain didn't like sumpin' one of fellows done. So he goes up to him an' calls him all sorts o' names and cusses him. Take me till to-morrow night to tell what all captain call him. Big boy

DOWN DON'T WORRY ME

says to captain he don't think he ought to talk to him like that. So captain knocks him down an' kicks him an' keeps kickin' him till he gits low in his mind.

So captain stands there waitin' for him to move. Then tells him to git up, damn him, git up. So he gits up an' captain tells boys if any of them don't like way he treat this fellow, to let him hear from 'em. Wus 'bout two hundred colored men, 'bout fifty had guns an' shells, captain an' 'nother man onliest white folks in six miles. Nobody never open his mouth, jes' walk off to cabins. Never could forgit it since I was boy.

Been mighty change since I been born,
Been mighty change since I been born,
Lawd, been mighty change since I been born,
Yes, my Lord, been mighty change since I been born.

Things I use to do, I don't do no mo',
Places I use to go, I don't go no mo',
People I use to see, I don't see no mo',
Yes, my Lord, been mighty change since I been born.

Howsomever, I seen white soldiers string up colored soldier in France an' shoot po' body full o' bullets. Terrified an' 'scruciated him befo' killed

WINGS ON MY FEET

him. Said he raped French girl. Boy swo' he didn't do nothin' wrong an' other colored soldiers know he didn't do no mo' than other soldiers. Don't make no difference. Took him an' made him dig big hole. Then made him put pole in bottom of hole an' 'noth-er pole 'cross top. Then tied his feet to bottom pole an' hands to top pole an' let him stay all night in rain. Nex' morning took him out an' strung him up, shootin' him full o' bullets. M. P.'s whut done it. Nex' few days colored soldiers skeered to poke heads out tents, leastwise skeered to go round much. Army don't have to fight Jerries, got plenty colored folks to fight.

Make me think 'bout one time back home white folks caught colored boy and done same thing down near where I wus workin' in construction camp. Never did know whut this boy done but crowd white men an' boys went to his house to git him. Mother of boy come out an' told white folks to let boy alone, he ain't done nothin'. She wus big dark lady an' had powerful temper. Leastwise she wusn't feelin' good an' wus waitin' fer old colored woman midwife, 'spectin' 'nuther baby that day.

So she told white folks they wa'n't nothin' but god-dam po' white trash bastards an' she wusn't 'fraid

DOWN DON'T WORRY ME

o' nobody. So they shoots her, gits big boy an' sets fire to house. Then they takes boy out an' hangs him an' shoots him full o' bullets like soldiers did colored boy in France.

I been down, down so long,
Down don't worry me.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

Thought about it heap o' times since I been in this war, but I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. Ain't gonna ketch me foolin' with how to fix up troubles. I can do what I have to do. Maybe time is comin' when I have to do it. Ain't studying' 'bout it now; ain't no time, ain't no place, ain't nothin' but me an' war an' my feelin's. Funny how always thinkin' 'bout sumpin' else, sumpin' I done, sumpin' I'm gonna do, folks I know, some other place better'n this, somebody thinkin' 'bout me, road callin' me on.

First few weeks in France thought wus mighty poor war. Kept tellin' boys I been mo' travelin' man an' seen heap mo' killin's in good old United States. Thought I would git me good sheer roastin'-ear milk, then git 'bout fohty wid brakes on an' Lawd, Lawd, would tell 'em I'm hard as blue steel. Would

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holler to Kaiser, Lawd, count yo' soldiers, 'cause
I'm bad man, gonna break up yo' jamboree.

Jerry, Jerry, ain't no use to run,
I got my butcher knife and gatlin' gun.
Death is in this land.

When I seen boys dyin' an' bein' buried in France
make me think 'bout big Billy Bob, white man, chief-
est of big contractors keepin' outlaw camps. Boys
say he had graveyard all his own. Reason why
wus when he kill a man or somebody in camp, like
bad nigger wus raisin' hell, or po' boy jes' skeered,
they jes' cover him up out in field an' that wus last
of him. Nobody knows nothin' 'bout it. Say boys
skeered to tell on 'em skeered they be covered up
too. Maybe one nigger shoot 'nother nigger or
maybe white foreman do it; don't make no differ-
ence. Cover him up. I seen 'em do it. War an'
buryin'-ground ain't nothin' new to me. Howsom-
ever, I don't like it, don't know whether I dislikes
it, but I can do whatever I have to do.

Eve'y time I start round this mountain,
My light goes out, Lawd, my light goes out;
I'm gonna buy me magnified lantern,
It won't go out, Lawd, it won't go out.

DOWN DON'T WORRY ME

I'm gonna buy me Winchester rifle,
An' box o' balls, Lawd, box o' balls;
I'm gonna back myself in the mountains,
To play bad, Lawd, to play bad.

Eve'ywhere I look, look this mornin',
Looks like rain, Lawd, looks like rain;
Rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet,
Ain't gonna rain, Lawd, ain't gonna rain.

Boys mighty ruffish in war camp, same as wus in road gangs an' construction camps. One night in camp in France boys got to playin' dozen. Jes' *would* play dozen 'scusin' captains an' lieutenants not bein' round, 'cause been told not to do it. Mighty ruffish game, boys talkin' 'bout other boys' folks. So one big boy tells 'nother big boy no use him worryin' 'bout his lovin' wife back home, 'cause somebody else shovelin' coal in his furnace. Told him she jes' like street-car, anyhow, plenty folks payin' fare an' she ain't gonna starve. So this boy gits so mad he jumps up an' takes shoe-heel and busts other boy's head wide open an' kills him dead. After that captain tells boys he's jes' natchelly gonna shoot next man goes to playin' dozen. Oh, my Lawd, wonder does my baby know right from wrong.

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Ole woman in the kitchen,
My sweetie hangin' round,
'Nother man gonna git her,
I'll sho' be bound,
'Cause I ain't free,
Lawd, 'cause I ain't free.

'Nother time I seen boys playin' dozen one boy
took razor and cut fellow up till he nearly dies.
Cut his head near'bout off.

Lawd, I don't play the dozen,
An' don't you ease me in.

Made me think 'bout time back home when desperado Moses shot bad man Bollis and his brother Reuben. Wus all-day church meetin' and two big boys tried to kill Moses. But ole Moses shot Bollis an' knocked Reuben in head jes' lak hog. Seen both of 'em layin' there, blood gushin' out Bollis' side, runnin' out mouth like butchered hog, Reuben bleedin' an' groanin', sisters faintin', screamin' an' prayin', big pistol lyin' on ground, men runnin' round, some standin' still, nobody don't know whut to do.

'Nother time seen one o' my sweet mamas take
pearl-handle razor an' rip open breast of nuther

girl. Wus quarrelin' 'bout whether did I belong to eitherest one. Yes, Lawd, me an' war same thing; killin' an' bleedin' ain't nothin' new to me.

Oh, Lawd, shot my pistol in heart of town,
Big chief hollered, "Don't you blow me down,"
Oh, Lawd, which way do red river run?
Lawd, run east an' west like risin' sun.

One day in France I seen po' boy settin' up 'gainst big tree with whole top of head cut clean off; shell whut done it. Boy never did move 'scusin' jes' slide right down by tree an' jes' settin' there dead. Made me think 'bout time when Fred Johnson an' Willie Williams got to fightin', both goin' with same girl, both had their clothes at her house. So Fred gits mad 'cause Willie took girl to show, an' says he gonna kill dam' scoundrel.

"Well, guess you think you got my water on?" Willie says to him.

"Yes, dam you, got it on three ways—hot, cold an' dirty. I would holler but this town too dam' small; I'm hard as blue steel an' I'm seein' blue sky through muddy water."

So he slips up behind Willie with switch-blade knife an' cuts his head clean off.

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Look out, nigger, watch my han',
Waited long time but got my man,
You got gal, I got you,
Devil git us both 'fo' we gits through.

Make me think 'bout 'nother fellow named Pete fell
out wid boy 'bout girl an' says to him if he be livin'
in mornin' it's because sumpin' God intended. So
sho' 'nuf he gits shotgun an' shoots him through
stomach an' scatters insides all over ground like
battle-field. Thought about, Lawd, thought about
it in France.

Well, I don't want no trouble,
Lawd, don't want no trouble,
Don't want no trouble with the Kaiser.
Lawd, Lawd, I wanta go home.

Howsomever I was mighty ruffish. Jes' too mean
to live an' felt my hell a-risin' in camp an' army
same as I did as travelin' man. Some of boys
skeered of me; some of officers seem like let me git
away with anything. Like I said as boy I wus
mean an' good fighter an' noisiest rascal anybody
ever seen. Still I keeps folks laughin' at my pranks
and my singin'. So in camp an' France sometimes
I would sing with boys an' sometimes I would hol-
ler out an' yodle all sorts of funny yodles jes' to

DOWN DON'T WORRY ME

make monkey out o' myself. Sholy like to devil Y. M. C. A. boys an' song leader like I wus tellin' 'bout. So boys would be singin' good old spiritual 'bout heaven, an' I would come trompin' in like god-dam an' start yodlin' an' hollerin' an' singin':

You got a gun, I got a gun,
All God's chilluns got a gun,
When I git to heaven,
Lawd, gonna shoot off my gun,
Gonna shoot all over God's heaven.

'Bout first thing I thought of when boat unloaded us in France wus lookin' round see if I could find friend, lookin' for one high yellow an' two teasin' browns. I disremembers this town ain't like others I been in, 'cause look jes' like I been here befo'. So I wus glad to be in towns in France an' make me think 'bout heap o' other towns I been in in my day. Take me till to-morrow night to tell 'bout 'em. Nothin' new to me.

I been in Norfolk 'bout hundred times an' seen ships comin' an' goin'. I been in New Orleans, bes' place to find most freest-hearted womens, an' I been on river boat all 'way up to St. Louis. Got stuck up in Chicago, got shot in Memphis, an' ho-boed through sweet ole Birmingham. Been in At-

WINGS ON MY FEET

lanta, leavin' there, and been in mo' towns than I can name till day after to-morrow. Been in 'bout forty states an' up in Canada an' down in fightin' Mexico. Me an' war is buddies.

I'm the hot-stuff man, from devil's land,
I'm a greasy streak o' lightning, don't you see?
Nobody's business but my own.

I been shot twice, I been cut mo'n once an' I been stuck up, befo' I ever gits drafted in big war. I got soldier-man sadness, I got soldier-man blues, me an' war same thing, gonna tell it to the folks when I git over there.

Brought my razor from other side,
Gonna whet that blade on Kaiser's hide.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

Likewise same as I been in mo'n fohty states an' in heap o' cities I done most every kind work man ever done. 'Scusin' I been in navy little while an' runnin' with shows, I had hard times in many places. Likewise I been in chain-gang two times, wearin' uniform of stripes, an' guard watchin' me with loaded gun. I been diggin' in Mississippi, diggin' in Kentucky, diggin' in Georgia, diggin' all

DOWN DON'T WORRY ME

over God's heaven. Lawd, Lawd, guess I can dig in France.

Diggin' in road-bed, diggin' in ditch,
Army done got me, captain got switch.
Lawd, I got ditch-diggin' blues.

I been helper in maloominum plant, stirrin' pots at Bessemer, janitor for mayor of two towns, factory hand, porter an' butler on railroad, an' wipin' up engines of Great Northwestern railroad. I been waiter in hotels an' restaurants. I sold papers in more'n one town. I worked as helper for carpenters an' layin' brick fer masons. I worked in store brushin' furniture, worked in a packing-house, an' in engine-house. I been in government camp an' in Ford factory. I plowed many hard-tail mules, cut wood to fire log engine, an' worked on green ends o' rolling lumber. I worked as harves' han' out wes'.

I been driver of teams, pick an' shovel man, worker in concrete, an' laborer in log camp an' hard roads. I worked on many railroad gangs an' sho' could drive steel for section boss. I worked keepin' yards an' mowing lawns, white-washin' fences, an' paintin' houses. I been yard an' house butler for white folks, travelin' with white men an' bootleggin', too.

WINGS ON MY FEET

I was hand on Mississippi Delta job, boatin' on Mississippi River an' on lake, diggin' in coal mine, an' workin' in steel foundry. I pressed clothes, helped in print shop, an' seem like 'bout hundred mo' jobs anybody ever do. So when I joins army look like officers see if can't give me ever kind o' job I ever had. Yet, I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. Howsomever, I jes' bound to git in devilment eve'ywhere I go.

So when army calls me I mus' go. Ain't no hero, ain't no coward. But I can do what I have to do. Don't like it, don't know if I dislikes it. Maybe I done forgot about it: maybe I recollects some things. Jes' can't be satisfied. I'm leavin' here walkin' an' talkin' to myself. Won't be satisfied here an' nowhere I go. I feel like train, mama, ain't got no drivin' wheel. I'm goin' 'way rid trouble off my mind. Lawd, I'm worried now, won't be worried long.

You may bring all yo' guns from battle-ship,
I'll make every Heine climb a tree,
Kaiser, don't you dare slight my repertation,
Or I'll break up yo' jamboree.

VI. Gonna Whet My Blade on Kaiser's
Hide



VI

GONNA WHET MY BLADE ON KAISER'S HIDE

So I felt my hell a-risin' again an' thought I would try the army a while. Maybe would be better than I had in camps and towns, maybe worse. Least-wise nothin' to do 'bout it. Wus drafted in service at 3:30 P.M. for Camp Mode. Thought army life mus' be good. Nuthin' to it fer travelin' man like me. Gonna take it easy, didn't give a dam. Gonna see does the Kaiser know right from wrong.

Joinin' army to git free clothes,
What we fightin' 'bout nobody knows,
Nobody's business but my own.

But after arriving at camp and knowing not how to get in column twos, being placed in line thought that I could march to the barret, and I couldn't catch the step to save my life. Couldn't squad right, couldn't squad left, couldn't squad face about.

Well, my name is Uncle Sam
An' I don't give a dam,
Nobody's business but my own.

WINGS ON MY FEET

First thing when we come into new camp boys begin hollerin' at us. Hollerin' dam if they didn't send for train load of po'k an' beans and here we come pokin' ourselves in camp instead. Some boys gittin' mad an' fightin' like playin' dozen near'bout. Me, I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet.

So walking along all unconcern, boys got to yelling, "Oh! you ruickey," "Oh, you ruickey that needle." So I thought I would stop and ask them what needle. One big boy says, "Wait till to-morrow and you will get one with a hood on the end."

I says, "Have you had one?" And he says, "Yes." So I says, "You big bloot you, if you stood it I know I can."

The officer says, "What in the hell you doing standing here; forward march." I marched up to 37 company D. P. o. p. B. B. 11. There I prepared my bed, went 'bout mile away to horse barns to get a tick of wheat straw and come back, and went 'bout two miles to get a blanket. Then line up for supper at 'leven o'clock that night. This was quite a nuisance to me so I had in mind to leave and go back home the next day with my little white straw hat on and norfolk coat.

GONNA WHET MY BLADE

Ruther be in corn-field workin' hard,
Than be buck private in national guard.
But I'm on my way, can't turn back.

But after leaving the mess hall and returning to the barret the corporal telling me of the camp rules, didn't turn my mind off leaving at all. In a few minutes the company commander come in and he repeated the same rules, and in his talk he says, "Any of you boys leave this camp without orders which means A. W. O. L. If so you gonna ketch hell." And I thought to myself if I should ketch hell on this side, and misfortune and die and go to hell on other side it would be two hells in one. So it paid me to stay in camp.

And on the first morning gave me ten minutes to dress for reverlee and five minutes thereafter. Next morning at five o'clock the bugle blowed for reverlee, I arose and dressed in ten minutes as ordered, went out not knowing where to go not even where I was. I dropped in line with some soldiers.

One boy says, "You can't stand here."

I says, "I stand where I please, ain't I in the army?"

WINGS ON MY FEET

'Bout that time sargent come to me and says, "What in the hell you doin' standing here; get over yonder with them ruckeys."

I says, "I guess I am a ruckey then."

"Yes," says he, "a dam' ruckey."

So after reverlee we goes in for mess and after that we goes to the supply house, and get clothing returning to barret an' goes to Marnel Station for examination. Passed 20:20 in everything, returned back to barret, goes to insurance offices and rested the rest of the day excepting standing retreat.

Next morning rising up early repeating the same duty going back to Marnel Station and taking a 'nocation, resting remainder of the day. And for six weeks couldn't wash my face. Then I was afraid to get enough to eat skeered I would get too much. One of the boys was such a big eater and a rough with it so they caught him stealin', an' give him a punishment with a guard over him and he had a can pickin' oats out of horse manure.

Funniest thing I ever seen
Big black soldier so dam' lean
Like to kill hisself eatin' pork an' beans.

Camp sholy was ruffish place. Some boys would form circle to say prayers at night, as usual. Whilst they was down to pray before taps, other boys was busy shooting craps. Some old hero from Florida rose up and says, "Boys, why don't you get up? Look here who's serving the Lord. Dam, if you got any time to serve the Lord," he says, "serve Uncle Sam; he is your best friend." So boys had to say prayers after taps.

After this I taken the flu, but they never would let me be excused. I served in all the drills and the medicine they give me wusn't nothing but pills. I served on detail three weeks building a road from the camp eight miles from town. In five days I couldn't eat neither drink. Made me stay on duty. And when I would report on the sick list sayin' I was sick they would say, "Die and prove it." Lawdy, Lawd, jes' like times I worked on chain-gang. Foreman would say, "Damit, die, an' prove it." War camp ain't nothin' new to me. Buildin' roads my middle name.

It takes the rock an' gravel,
 To make this solid road;
 It takes a good-lookin' woman
 To satisfy my soul.

WINGS ON MY FEET

First morning reverlee by bein' one minute late gettin' in line had three days' punishment on dump. So goin' out to the open-air theater one night, we put up pretty good fight. Got two weeks fer that.

'Nother time I got in trouble, jes' bound to git in devilment. Don't mean no harm, jes' feel my hell a-risin'. Way it wus, officers started after me an' jes' 'bout time they gonna ketch me, I stoops down low an' two officers go pilin' over me on groun'. Reason I wus runnin wus officers took us out on parade an' tells us to right face. Some boys face about, some lef' face, an' I makes out like I don't know nothin' an' so starts runnin' like hell. Never could tell whether officers tickled at my funny ways or whether wus mad. Leastwise made me do without supper, double time two hours next day, an' give me ten days' kitchen duty. Yet I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet.

Gonna take my razor to the other side,
Gonna whet that blade on Kaiser's hide,
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

So they seen couldn't do nothin' else with me an' transferred back to my company which my question was to sign up for six months' free schooling. But we was on such good drive over yonder until

I did not get my esure. Didn't want it no way for I was rarin' to go. This company which I was transferred to 14 service signal call. And when I entered the commander ask me does I know anything about signal, and so I saluted him, "I do not, sir, I am here to learn." And as I turned him over my papers and was taken to my barret, then I was admitted into the buzzard school learning signals, da, dit, fa, na, dit, fo, ei. Flag signal for the same, giving from twenty answers a minute going over the top and sham battlin'. Oh, boy! some good time here.

Then commander told us he was ordered to send men trained or half trained to France. Some of boys got skeered, didn't want to go over and so eat soap pills so they wouldn't stand short circumspection. Old John and Henry went A.W.O.L. And they really caught hell, with fifteen years in prison in Fort Leavenworth. Wa'n't no use to play sick. Gonna git you anyhow. Gonna give you barrel castor-oil.

Me an' old Jesse wus on guard one night. We both had got so mean an' wished we wus in France on the firing-line. As we walked our post late that night the day officer and his wife, and little black dog

WINGS ON MY FEET

come tramping along. Of course we hollered, "Halt! who come there?" and the officer said, "Friend of the camp." So we said, "Advance and be recognized." So he comes little closer, an' we says, "Halt! who comes here?" He said, "Officer of day, wife and dog." So I hollered out, "If you the officer of the day what in hell you doin' out here this time o' night?"

The next morning early after reverlee we goes in for mess and was ordered to fall in line an' march to the supply house for oversea equipments. Only two months in camp, then after returning goes out on drill field. Drill from nine in the mornin' till five-thirty without eatin' or drinkin'. Look like I jes' can't make it. Bound to be fallin' to my face. Howsomever, I'm principled up like this. I can do what I have to do.

Next morning 'bout four o'clock surgeon blowed his whistle, every devil an' his swine fall out with his pack rifle forty-five. Then we had a thirty-mile straight hike, return back on that night about ten o'clock, every devil fall out in line with bag and equipments. Here we had a three-mile hike to another barret. Jes' natchelly went to sleep with my meskit on. Too sleepy to take it off.

Next morning commander called us out fall out in column twos an' general lectured to us. Told us we had to be booked in a few days for overseas. Said we boys had been seeing easy time on this side, and when we found it bad over there make the best out of it we can. Said he wanted every soldier to get a man before he died. So I said I'm goin' over there and get as many Germans as I can put in a tank an', dam' if I ain't comin' back home.

Kaiser, Kaiser, count yo' men,
Big black soldier's comin' in,
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

As we stood in line in attention three-quarters of an' hour he said rest and attention again and dismissed. As we returned to the barret, blowed whistle for every devil to fall out in line. So we fell in line, marchin' forward and I ask some of the boys where in hell are we going. Said, dam' if they knowed. On down to the gas station we goes to take gas practise and test puttin' on gas-mask. Right back to drill field practisin' right shoulder arm, left shoulder arm, present arm, and port arm, order arm. Then after 'treat call out for short arm inspection.

Next morning after reverlee boarded train for

WINGS ON MY FEET

Camp Afervail. Landed at Camp Afervail one night, booked next day. But never did sail that time. Turned back in few days to Camp Afervail and transferred back to old camp. Boys mad as hell. When came to town near camp commander and all the officers lost control of the soldiers. Boys decided gonna have some liquor an' so tore out to barroom worser than bloodhounds after raw beef. We act sociable long as money last, then we went snatching and jerking. In few minutes every barroom wus closed. But believe me, we soldiers had our shear.

Well, my name is Uncle Sam,
And I don't give a dam,
If I takes a toddy now and then.
Ain't been sober since last October,
An' I don't know the reason why.

So next day company commander had all soldiers form circle an' lectured to 'em. Called 'em all sorts an' kinds o' names. Told us if any of us go A. W. O. L. we gonna ketch hell. An' all time we thought we wus already ketchin' hell now! So we returns to barret singin':

All we do is sign pay-roll,
All we do is sign pay-roll,
Lawd, all we do is sign pay-roll,
An' never draw a dog-gone cent.

GONNA WHET MY BLADE

Thought officers mad as hell, didn't know whut to do. Boys gittin' mighty rough. Oughta heard them dices ring, oughta heard them singin' blues, drinkin', cussin', gamblin', goin' wid women, Lawd, Lawd, make me think 'bout old times in construction camps and women comin' out from town, Lawd, Lawd.

Wouldn't give my high brown Bell,
For all madomsells this side o' hell,
Got them awful deep-sea blues.

Thought we had hard time gettin' back to camp some nights. One night old James got hold of wrong girl an' some ole servitor beat him up so bad till he didn't know where he wus, neither who he wus. Took me to call him home to promised land with my good right fist. Brought him home, laid other fellow low. One time I got so drunk couldn't tell where I wus at neither who I was an' got in next day an' caught hell like blue steel in hot sun.

Done give myself to Uncle Sam,
Now I ain't worth a good goddam,
I don't want no mo' camp,
Lawd, I want to go home.

One night I wus out on guard duty an' been goin'

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on so till I wus tired an' sleepy. So I went to sleep settin' up 'gainst pile o' wheat straw. So some big officer comes by an' hollers to me askin' who I is an' whut I'm doin'. So I rises up, steadyin' myself an' say, "I am some sort of soldier, who the hell are you?"

Officer replies, "I am some sort of Major-General." So I says, "I guess I better bring you some sort o' salurt, then." So I had company punishment ten days. I jes' *would* be gittin' into devilment all time.

Howsomever, I seen one white boy on sentry duty standing an' leanin' 'gainst haystack up 'bout Norfolk, froze stiff an' dead befo' he wus found. Must 'a' jes' got sleepy like I did an' in cold winter of 1917 jes' went to sleep an' never did wake up, least-wise 'scusin' it be in heaven or hell. War got that buddy, never got me.

One time boys got so homesick an' so mean till I told 'em I would go with them an' call out Major Beetle. So we goes down to headquarters an' asks for the major but when he comes out we speaks, neither does we salute. He asks us why the hell we don't salute. I tells him I don't think I ought

to salute when I am mad as hell. So he says, mad or no mad, you salute me twelve times. So we begins an' him in return. Never done nothin' else to us.

'Nother time crowd of us boys wus in town waitin' for way to git back to camp. So we sets round in circle an' starts rollin' them bones. Policeman comes 'long, sorter oldish captain, an' says to us, boys, he knows he can't arrest us but we got to stop shootin' dices. So we asks him what the hell he's gonna do. So he walks over an' says he can take our dices. An' so he does. I gits up in front of him an' tells him he's gonna give us dices, don't me or him one gonna eat breakfast or dinner in hell, don't make no difference to me which one of us it is. So other boys git up an' tells him that's right, we gonna have our dices back. So old man jes' grins an' hands 'em back to us, an' goes off mutterin' 'bout niggers runnin' this country, dam, if they ain't.

'Nother time one Sat'day night I wus goin' 'cross bridge of creek hollerin' an' singin', namin' name of soldier, 'bout fohty wid brakes on. So Law comes up to me an' says I better watch my step. So I don't do nothin' but pick officer up an' throw him over bridge in muddy creek.

WINGS ON MY FEET

Oh, I'm mighty warrer in the army,
I'm mighty warrer fer my Lord,
I'm fightin' soldier in the army,
I'm soldier in army of the Lord.

Howsomever, got in trouble one time. Tried same things on Law, cuttin' up an' knowin' officers couldn't 'rest me. 'Bout that time seen M. P.'s comin' round corner. Actual fact, run me up branch 'bout five miles. Wus hard boys, neitherest one of us gonna give up. M. P.'s say I'm gonna stop, else I'm gonna go down, else, I'm comin' an' go with them. So I has to do it.

'Bout that time moved me to 'nother camp. Thought they move me more'n other boys, least-wise took me to seven camps, maybe more'n eight, 'scusin' all I been in after I goes overseas. Can't name 'em all, take me till to-morrow night to tell 'bout it. Thought I jes' bound to be travelin' soldier, rookie or no rookie, feel my hell a-risin'. Me an' war same thing. Been havin' it all my day; gonna have it till I die.

VII. Me and War Same Thing

VII

ME AND WAR SAME THING

ONE time in camp up 'bout Portsmouth I wus walkin' along an' white lieutenant hollers at me, "Where the hell you going?" So I says, "Where the hell you think I'm goin'?"

Neither does I salute him.

So he asks me if I knows I'm talkin' to officer, an' I says, yes, hell, does he know he's talkin' to enlisted man.

So we stands there starin' at one 'nuther. He takes matter up with officers but nothin' to do 'bout it, 'caused he started ruckus not treatin' me like soldier.

Some white officers principled up like this, every colored soldier wus no more than dog, jes' sumpin' out there to work. When I'm feelin' my hell a-risin' all white officers come befo' me jes' lak gourd vine. If treat me right, I treats them right; if be pleasant to me, I be pleasant to them; if treat me rough,

WINGS ON MY FEET

I'm mean as hell I know. Can't help it, nothin' to do 'bout it, me an' war same things.

It takes a rubber ball to bounce,
It takes a baseball to roll,
But it takes a dam' good preacher
To send salvation to my soul.

I'm principled up like this, I can do what I have to do, an' if war gonna git me, it gonna git me, ain't no use worryin' 'bout it. Howsomever war never got me, never will. Me an' war same thing. I got rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.

Reason officer spoke to me wus this way. We had jus' come to new camp an' colored soldiers always havin' trouble when come to new place. So one evenin' late, boys all wet an' cold an' tired from workin' in rain all day, loadin' box cars. So wus gettin' late an' boys didn't work very fast. Boys jes' natchelly tired an' don't want to work nohow. So lieutenant comes up an' hollered at boys callin' 'em goddam niggers an' all sorts an' kind o' names. Wus white officer done it.

So we didn't do nothin' but beat that lieutenant up an' throw him in box car an' after we git mo' calm in our minds we starts singin':

ME AN' WAR SAME THING

You got wings, I got wings,
All God's chilluns got wings;
When I git to heaven, gonna flap my wings,
Gonna fly all over God's heaven.

Well, they had whole battalion 'rested, which I was one, an' was walkin' 'bout when officer ask me where the hell I wus goin' like I told 'bout. Had hard time gittin' matter fixed up.

So one day big white officer come over to camp to see 'bout what could he do 'bout fixin' things up. So he comes on over to where big colored superior officer wus standin' an' comes up from behind an' hollers at him natural like jes' same as if he wus man in street in Birmingham or somewhere. Big colored officer don't do nothing but walk off with one o' them big short cigars in mouth whut he wus always smokin'. So white officer comes on over further an' hollers again. Colored officer don't look round but asks him if he knows he's speakin' to superior officer.

So white officer has to go round in front of colored officer an' salute. Colored officer takes his time, puffin' at big cigar, then takes cigar out of mouth an' salutes. Then he tells white officer to stand at

WINGS ON MY FEET

'tention till he gits back. So he walks off an' stays 'bout half-hour, which he then tell white officer he can go. So after that thought we didn't have no mo' trouble only moved us to 'nother camp. Lawdy, Lawd, always movin' on, but just suit me, Lord, just suit me.

This old world's rollin', rollin',
This old world's rollin' on,
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

Howsomever, had some mighty fine officers both colored and white. Some of finest white men ever put on pair britches. Like I say if officers treat me right seem to take a likin' to me with my winnin' ways, 'scusin' when I'm 'bout half split, maybe fohty wid cleaver. Would let me git 'way with most anything. Howsomever done sumpin' to fine captain one time didn't aim to do.

Wus this way. I wus pretty good fighter an' boys always havin' fights. Jes' scrappin' an' also fights with gloves on. If boys jes' have to fight would git gloves, give 'em to boys, an' tell 'em to go to it, damit, to fight. Would have big time hollerin' an' watchin' 'em bust one 'nuther open. Like I wus sayin' I wus pretty good fighter an' would step out

an' holler, "Anybody better fighter than I is, ain't no wall between us." So nobody would step out.

One day, whilst I wus steppin' round talkin' 'bout it, little black boy runs up an' hits me uppercut an' knocks me flat. Boy slips out an' runs like rabbit. But I seen which way he goes an' so I jumps up an' starts after him. I wus mad as wet hen an' sholy gonna lay his body down. Boys hollerin' an' laughin' cause little fellow first one to git me. So I runs round corner where I seen him go an' rushes up behin' him an' hits him on side o' head with left an' right, *bam, bam*, like pile-driver or sumpin'. Falls down like tree.

Howsomever, wus white captain I hit, neither wus it little black boy. Way it wus this little fellow dodge behin' captain when he seen me comin' an' I wus so mad didn't see nothing but man standin' there. Lawd, thought I wus skeered o' myself. Didn't mean to hit captain. Oh, my God, what shall I do?

Never did know how mad captain wus, never done much to me. Captain always bettin' on me an' would talk 'bout what good fighter I wus. Howsomever, had to do something with me, eve'ybody

laughin' at him. Thought it must 'a' been funny sight, big black buck private knockin' white captain down, with *bam, bam* on side of head. So told me if I had to be knockin' sumpin' I could kill three hundred flies 'fo' I got any supper. Didn't I would ketch hell.

Thought I was gonna git off easy but told me when I got through killin' all flies in world gotta peel four thousand potatoes. Reason kep' on givin' me mo' punishment wus other white officers would rag him 'bout gittin' knocked out by Tiger Gordon, champion black boy fighter of world. Heard one officer come up to him an' say:

"Well, Captain, that black boy knocked hell out o' you, didn't he?"

Captain didn't say nothin'. So other officer repeats, "Well, Captain, I say, that nigger got a clean knockout, eh?" So Captain says, "Yes, by God, and I'm gonna get one, too," but he misses other officer who ducks an' runs off. Howsomever, captain don't hold no grudge 'gainst me and wus always whoopin' 'em up when I would git in good fight.

Had some big fights in camp. One black boy wus

mighty hard for me to kill, but knowed I would git him some day. Name wus Job Jenkins but called him Battlin' Cowboy 'cause he come from Texas. So fixed up ringside seats an' had big Sat'day-night fight. Called me Tiger Gordon. One crowd hollerin' for me an' 'nother crowd hollerin' for Cowboy. Lawdy Lawd, could fight better hearin' crowd yellin'. If yelled fer me, made me feel like bear-cat huggin' lion. If yelled for Cowboy make me so mad could see dry land through muddy water, gonna knock hell out of Cowboy sho'.

Boys would say to me, "Oh, you Tiger, that Battlin' Cowboy sho' is hard." "He's a son of a gun." "He's a hell of a Do." "He has boxed all over New York." "Cowboy jes' gonna be too smart for you." "You jes' natchelly too slow for Cowboy."

So I would say, "Yes, by God, I'm a Sunrose. I'm hell. I'm yellor hammer goin' North. I'm sober-headed big boy, gonna shoot into him. Gonna bust him so dam' hard till he's like scrambled eggs. Gonna hit 'im on side of head till he can't guide hisself. Gonna tear his rump."

So crowd would start hollerin', "Hurry up, Cowboy, hit 'im in that one spot." "Kill 'im, Cowboy."

"I'd kill that crutch boy any time." "That got 'im."
"See that Cowboy comin'."

Boys would holler to me, "Whoopee, Tiger, I want you to cut his throat this time." "I ain't satisfied." "Break his neck." "Reason I went to church Sunday, wus prayin' for you." "Step out, Tiger, he ain't no woman." "Hit 'im." "Give him jes' one mo' like that an' I'll be satisfied." "Hee, hee, ketch 'im, Tiger, tear 'im in the rump." "That Cowboy wants palat on flo'."

Other crowd keep hollerin' to Cowboy, "Hit 'im, Cowboy." "Come on, you got a fighter now." "He ain't no woman, hit him." "Please, papa, oh boy, dodge that left." "Git yo' head inside that rope." "Hey, this ain't no rastlin' match." "Hey, quit that, you don't need no rest, hit 'im." "Kill that Tiger."

My crowd keeps hollerin', "Watch that boy." "Oh, you Tiger, you makin' me one hundred dollars." "Won't be long now." "Wa-ha-a-he-ho-o—yood-l-e." "Oh, Lawd, look-ayonder, ha-e-h-a-ha." "Whoopee, jes' one mo' time an' you got him." "Work it, Tiger, work it." "Whoop-ee-a-yah—*bam, bam*, kill him, Tiger."

'Bout that time I seen Cowboy stop an' shake his head, look like he don't know where he is at. So I shoots him on other side of head *bam, bam*. Sound like hame-string poppin'. Cowboy shakes his head like dog comin' up out of water. So I lands big uppercut an' Cowboy goes down. Won't be so iron jawed with me no mo'.

I'm fightin' man, from devil's land,
I'm greasy streak o' lightning, don't you see?
Lord, I got them left-right blues.

We had heap other fights, big boys an' little boys. One of funniest sights I ever seen since I been born wus little black boy 'bout five feet high knockin' big black boy over six feet tall cold as monkey-wrench. Little fellow wus too quick fer him, Lawd, Lawd. 'Nother funny sight wus when two boys been fightin', one boy knocked other down. Referee held up this fellow's arm signifyin' he wus winner. 'Bout that time other boy got up an' wus so mad knocked winner cold, an' started fightin' referee an' eve'ybody else in ring. Took 'bout four men to cool him off.

Howsomever, maybe 'bout funniest sight wus times when we would have "battle royal." Wus like this.

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'Bout ten boys, leastwise maybe eight or ten or twelve, would git in ring all at one time. Would fight to see who could stay in longest. Soldiers an' maybe officers, too, would git up money an' say to boys anybody wants to come in on this battle royal got chance to win some plus money. If so to come on in an' fight. One whut stays longest would git, maybe twenty dollars, an' next boy maybe fifteen. Wus some funny fightin', funny as hell I know. Boys hittin' an' talkin' an' boastin'. One day everybody been knocked out but me an' little banter rooster black boy, boastin' 'bout whut he's gonna do to me. Wus gonna blow me down first lick. Wus little shorty fellow. So I steps up an' looks down at him, makin' jes' like I'm gonna talk to him. Jokes him 'bout us bein' buddies. Then I smears his face all way from eyes clean down to chin with big right an' left, makin' boy so dizzy he's crawlin' round tryin' to find ropes to git out.

Wus one white captain, big college football player, an' jes' *would* keep boys playin' football befo' we left for overseas. Would pick out big boys an' fast boys and get up different teams. Had some hot stuff games. Wus way boys learned song, "Touchdown, Army, Touchdown, Army," I already told 'bout singin' in France.

ME AN' WAR SAME THING

One of funniest things I ever seen wus at big football game. Wus this way. I told 'bout two big boys couldn't learn squad right, squad left, an' nothin', yet eve'ybody likes 'em an' they makes good workers an' soldiers an' always keepin' eve'ybody laughin'. Well, called 'em Funny Sambo and Shorty Geech. Sholy could play football 'scusin' could they ever git signals right. Jes' ain't nobody could stop 'em. Called 'em all-army half-backs.

Well, this wus big game, had majors an' generals come in visitin' camp near Jacksonville. Eve'ybody havin' good time. Boys gittin' ready to play, joree-in' and big-mouth talkin'. Called one side Black Bears, other side Striped Tigers. Bears growlin', tigers yowlin'. On one side boys had little black Florida bear cub leadin' him up an' down. On other side boys had striped wildcat screechin' an' spittin'. Lawdy, Lawd, started singin' "Touchdown, Army, Touchdown, Army," but that song too tame for crowd.

Lawd, we're in the army now,
We're not behind the plow,
We'll never git rich,
Gonna dig that ditch,
We're in the army now.
Well, wa'n't he runnin', child?

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Official hollers to captain of teams, "Is you ready?" "Yes, by God." Whistle blows. Black Bears kick off an' ball flies right straight in arms of Shorty Geech. Boy starts runnin' round lef' side, butts head straight into Black Bear tacklin' him, turns round, goes clear cross field and makes touchdown first play. Lawdy, Lawd, boys yellin', big generals laughin', soldiers hollerin',

Kaiser, Kaiser, count yo' men,
Shorty Geech gonna tell you when.

Howsomever, on nex' kick-off Funny Sambo fumbles ball an' Black Bears gits it. They got some good men an' don't take 'em long to push ball over for touchdown. Had big boy good at kickin' an' so kicked goal. Score wus seven to six cause Tigers too excited to kick goal after first touchdown. Boys mighty hard on Sambo, callin' him dam', flat-footed, crippled Tiger. Sambo mad as hell.

So they kicks off to Bears this time an' Bears go right down field with line buckin' an' passes till score 'nother touchdown. Don't kick no goal this time. Boys howlin', stands cheerin', folks runnin' up an' down side-lines. So kicks off again an' teams 'bout even, neither can they make touchdown. Boys playin' hard, swearin' an' callin' of names, holdin'

an' sluggin' an' bitin'. Wus ruffish game. Boys don't need no Germans to fight, got plenty of it now.

First half nearly over an' Funny Sambo gits ball. Sholy could push through pile o' Black Bears crowdin' in on 'em. Made ten yards, then run 'bout fohty through whole dam' team. Then fumbles ball jes' befo' gits over. Whistle blows for end of half an' Sambo so mad he's weepin' an' swearin' like wild man. Black Bears wus thirteen an' Striped Tigers six.

So begins second half. Bears kicks off to Tigers an' Shorty Geech runs back ball good little way. Then gits ball again an' makes 'bout ten yards through line. Seen Sambo shakin' his head an' lookin' funny. Look like he wus starin' at sumpin' an' act like he wus confuse. So they gives ball to Shorty again an' Shorty starts to run. Sambo don't do nothin' but hit him over head an' take ball an' start runnin' like goddam back wrong way. Sambo thought Geech wus runnin' wrong way, neither did he remember had changed goals at beginnin' of second half. Howsomever, fellow ketches up with him jes' befo' he gits cross wrong line an' tells him 'bout it. So Sambo don't do nothin' but turn round, starts 'cross fiel', side-steppin', stiff armin' and jabbin' Bears

right an' lef'. Look like wild man. *Wus* wild man. Makes touchdown. Crowds goin' wild, big generals hollerin' an' whoopin'. Never seen like since they been born. Couldn't kick goal, howsomever, an' Bears wus still thirteen an' Tigers twelve.

'Nother thing Sambo could do wus throw football like bullet or baseball or sumpin'. Had hands like grabbin' fork of big steam-shovel. Could wrap them fingers round it. Could throw ball like baseball pitcher. So started forward-passin' game. Shorty would ketch ball an' go trompin' 'cross field like goddam. Got to makin' them forward passes. So Shorty Geech an' Sambo breaks loose, makin' three touchdowns, leastwise maybe wus two more. Won game. Striped Tigers carried Shorty an' Sambo off field on shoulders, done forgot all 'bout fumblin' ball.

Played football different way in France. Never seen it befo'. Wus sort of turrible game, way they played it. Would git up several teams. Would put ball on hill. One man would kick it an' rush to beat ball. Would butt ball with head, knock it with hands, kick it with feet. Would gouge one 'nother an' quarrel. Never did like that game, neither did I learn to play it.

'Nother thing boys done in camp near Jacksonville wus make up band of their own. Would sing an' play an' never tire of music. Some boys say that wus what they like most in army. So we made us up band of instruments. Thought I had my twelve-string Laura. Like I wus sayin' when I gits to goin' good, pickin' out my tunes an' singin', make me forgit everything. Ain't no time, ain't no troubles, ain't nothin' but me an' war and my feelin's. Thought I couldn't stand camp 'scusin' didn't have no musicianers an' songsters, neither band.

So one fellow made him guitar out of cigar box, one boy takes jug, 'nother fellow takes tin pan. So we makes up all sorts an' kinds instruments an' plays on 'em, makin' pretty good music, leastwise crowd likes it. So they takes up collection an' gits regular pieces for us. From that we started an' kept pickin' up boys which wus good musicians an' so befo' we went to France had good band. Would lead singing an' marchin' an' sometimes would play specially for officers.

Whenever major or captain would come round captain would have boys sing. Maybe would be out on field drillin'. So would be 'bout thousand men, some singin' base, some tenor, some other kinds an' sholy

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would harmonize. Wished I could be settin' off on hill somewhere jes' listenin' to 'em sing. Had all sorts an' kinds o' songs take me till to-morrow night to count 'em. Couldn't name 'em all. Some army songs an' some religious songs. Look like boys just made to sing, forgits troubles an' army an' eve'y-thing. Singin' an' war same things.

Officers like to hear soldiers sing songs with deep rollin', boomin' voices. Would sing special war songs, like "Good-by, Broadway, Hello, France," "Long Trail a-Winding," an' others same as white soldiers sung. But what officers like to hear wus songs like "I am Climbing Jacob's Ladder," "Do You Think I'll Make a Soldier," "I Been Fightin' in Army of Lord All My Life," "Do Lord Remember Me," "Jesus Is Listenin' All Night Long" or maybe:

I want to be ready, I want to be ready,
Walkin' to Jerusalem just like John;
Oh, Lord, won't you come by here,
Lord, won't you hear my prayer—
Oh, yes, Lord, I want to be ready,
Yes, walkin' to Jerusalem just like John.

Made good marchin' song an' army chorus. Thought boys felt like could walk clean over on other side.

ME AN' WAR SAME THING

But song one big general liked most wus way boys
sung Jurden song, namin' names of officers, rollin'
down to Jurden, hallelujah, rollin' down to Jurden.

Roll, Jurden, roll, roll, Jurden, roll,
You ought 'a' been settin' in kingdom,
To hear sweet Jurden roll.

Roll, Jurden, roll, roll, Jurden, roll.
Oh, my mother ought 'a' been settin' in kingdom
To hear sweet Jurden roll.

Roll, Jurden, roll, roll, Jurden, roll,
Oh, my captain ought 'a' been settin' in kingdom
To hear sweet Jurden Roll.

So would sing "my general," "my corporal," an'
other officers, song gettin' better an' better, risin'
an' swellin' up all over God's heaven, an' then slow
down soft an' easy.

Lord, rollin' down in Jurden,
Hallelujah,
Lord, let's go down in Jurden.
Hallelujah,
I'm on my way, can't turn back.
Lord, rollin' down in Jurden.
Don't you grieve after me.

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'Bout quittin' time an' so boys would go marchin' back to camp. Could hear 'em trompin', could see 'em struttin', song stirrin' 'em up, music callin' 'em on. Some boys would sing an' some would shout, "Lawd, Lawd," "Yes, oh, my Lord," an' would go trampin' on, little further on, marchin' an' singing till visitin' officers jes' could hear 'em.

We'll roll the old chariot along,
We'll roll the old chariot along,
We'll roll the old chariot along,
And we won't drag on behind.

If drunkard's in way, we'll stop an' take him on,
An' we won't drag on behind.

If harlot's in way, we'll stop an' take her on,
Yes, my Lord, an' we won't drag on behind

If gambler's in way, we'll stop an' take him on,
Lawd, an' we won't drag on behind.

VIII. Boy, Did You Ever Think about
Dying?

VIII

BOY, DID YOU EVER THINK ABOUT DYING?

'BOUT that time moved us to 'nother camp. Told us we wus gettin' ready to go overseas. Howsomer, we stayed in that camp long time befo' moved us to last one. Had sorrowful thing happen. One of my chieftest buddies, Charley Alexander Hooper, got killed, neither could police find out who killed him. Boys called him "Hoof" an' sho' wus some hoofer. Me an' Hoof made powerful pair buddies. Found him all shot up one mornin' 'bout risin' of sun. Law can't find out who done it. I'm gonna git that dam' rascal if last thing I do. Ruther stick man killed my buddy wid bayonet than shoot Kaiser Bill with fohty-fo'.

Wus this way. Hoof wus big high brown boy. Women belong to him wid his winnin' ways. Wus hawk like pizen to men foolin' wid him. Maybe Hoof would come to new town. 'Nother black boy would come up to him an' say he wus rooster on the roost, an' was 'bout time Hoof be gittin' along, 'scusin' he don't want no spurs stuck in his belly. So Hoof would say, hell, he wus hawk whut *eats* roosters,

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and any black roosters round better watch out. Look like they jes' skeered of him; leastwise nobody could run him off.

If Hoof wanted girl would jes' say, "Well, I believe I'll git that baby." So she would fall in love with him an' leave husband or sweetheart. Hoof would have mo' sweet mamas than he could be sweet papa to. Would give him money an' likker an' be sweet mama to him. Howsomever, in this town near new camp Hoof found him pretty high brown. Thought he would leave all other women alone. Hoof wus crazy 'bout this teasin' brown, an' she was crazy 'bout Hoof. Eve'ybody else crazy 'bout her likewise an' Hoof scattered niggers like hawk swoopin' down on chickens. Still this girl so foolish in her head 'bout Hoof wouldn't let other boys touch her. Would call 'em cheap skates, signifyin' she had handsome, high brown soldier hero. Would jes' go blind an' rave over Hoof. If he jes' look at her she jes' open up an' fall in his arms. Jes' wouldn't let him go, would do anything for him an' never tire. Hoof swear he's gonna stay with her till hell freeze over.

Thought this high brown baby wus kind of woman make bulldog join church, make tadpole fight a

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whale, make bear-cat hug a lion. Could croon mo' achin'-hearted blues than angels in heaven could sing. Would croon bleedin'-hearted homesick blues. Then Lawd, Lawd, would step out with lovin' baby songs.

Some black devil slacker bound to git po' Hoof, gonna lay his body down. Played bad on him. Must 'a' sneaked up from behind an' shot him down. Onliest way could git him. So found him with hole in his head 'bout risin' of sun. Said I wus gonna git dam' scoundrel shot po' Hoof. I'm bad man, bad as hell I know. Gonna find him out, tell you 'bout it. Gonna lay his body down some day.

So I feels my hell a-risin'. I gits soldier blues, homesick blues, railroad blues, ain't got no fare. Got every kind o' blues anybody ever had, cryin' blues, swearin' blues, don't-care blues, 'fo'-day blues, down-hearted blues.

Oh, my baby, Lawd,
You don't know my mind,
When you think I'm laughin',
Laughin' to keep from cryin'.

Jes' bound to git in trouble some way. My blues don't have no time, no place, no sense. Felt my hell

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a-risin'. Would roll them dice, play hell with women, git high as Georgia pine, seein' clear sky through dam' mud-hole. Got them crazy blues. Hey, baby, hey, honey, got them crazy blues. Me an' war same thing, nothin' to do 'bout it, goddam.

If I feel to-morrow, Lawd,
Oh, Lord, like I feel to-day,
Good God, gonna shoot my captain,
Lord, an' walk away.

Wus bound to git in trouble some way. Me an' war buddies, fightin's my middle name. So I seen big black preacher settin' up to this brown baby, talkin' sweet honey 'bout restin' in bosom of Jesus. I'm watchin' this black scoundrel. Don't like 'im, thinkin' 'bout po' Hoof. Got them crazy blues, hey baby, hey, honey, don't know whether I'm gittin' sleepy, else gittin' hard as blue steel.

So I straggles 'long followin' black preacher an' high brown lady takin' walk. I hears po' girl weepin' an' moanin', sayin' she ain't got nothin' to live fer. Wants po' Hoof. Say she don't believe Jesus is listenin' all day long, an' she don't give a dam if He is. Preacher says Hoof wus sinner-man gone to judgment day.

'Bout that time I feels my hell a-risin', got crazy blues. Got ramblin' blues, got bad-man blues, gonna have them chain-gang blues. So I goes trompin' round, gonna git in front of dam' nigger. Gonna call him ever name 'scusin' Son of God.

So I comes staggerin' up bellowin' like a bull. 'Bout that time my feets near'bout freeze to ground. I don't know whether I'm in heaven or hell. Don't know whether I'm skeered or fightin' mad. Me an' war same thing. Got fightin' blues, can't be satisfied. Oh, my God, seen po' Hoof come floatin' in between big preacher an' high brown girl, floatin' in coffin, lid poppin' off, oh, my God. Seen hole in his head, seen blood gushin' out. Seen po' Hoof signifyin' to me big black devil whut done it.

Got them crazy blues, done gone mad, yellin' an' hollerin'. "Oh, my God, po' Hoof, is you hurt?" "Is you shot?" "Where is you at?" "I'm comin', Buddy, gonna kill that black nigger sho' as hell." So high brown lady gits to screamin', I'm comin' on tryin' to git my hands on nigger. Got him by throat, gonna choke him till eyeballs pop out, gonna break his neck jes' like chicken. Thought preacher begin to pray, oh, Lord to have mercy on him. Thought Hoof wus breathin' fire on him, eyes look

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like little red balls o' lightnin' flashin'. Oh, my God,
never seen such a sight since I been born. Preacher
hollerin', lady screamin', I'm cussin' an' fightin' an'
yellin' like devil hisself.

Shot my pistol in heart of town,
Big chief holler, "Don't you blow me down."
Oh, which a-way did po' girl go?
She left here runnin' is all I know.

'Bout that time M. P.'s come up. Big black nigger
went crashing through fence palin' an' woods like
bear on hillside. Never did ketch him. Made his
getaway like greasy streak o' lightnin'. But I'm
gonna git his dam' skin yet. M. P.'s got me an' took
me back to camp. Good thing locked me up. Had
them crazy blues, gonna raise hell. Been in army
longer than I stays in camp. Never stays more'n
three weeks, leastwise never mo'n four in no one
place. But I'm in army now, nothin' to do 'bout it.
Made me tote big rocks weighin' 'bout one hundred
fifty pounds; made me carry turn wood mile an'
half, made me cut cord-wood, made me do all sorts
an' kinds o' things.

Lord, wish I wus in Georgia,
Singin' chain-gang blues.
I'm on my way an' can't turn back.

Howsomever got letter from my mother. Gits me to thinkin' 'bout sumpin' else. Like I told you she wus mighty fine lady, always helpin' somebody an' always talkin' 'bout how good Lord been to her. So she wrote me to do best I could. Told me 'bout my sister's husband dyin' with flu an' said she had letter from her. My sister wus in Washington an' mama says hopes charity folks won't let her suffer. Wus writin' her to come on home and would take keer of her an' children. Wus always doin' things like that.

My sister wus onliest one of us children got much schoolin'. Like I told about mama tried to give us all education, don't see how she done so much, keepin' us in school, workin' for us an' workin' for white folks, an' all time have to keep up high yellow husband, an' fight no-'count high yellow scoundrel. After my sister got through goin' to school went to teachin' an' made good money. Thought mama was mighty proud of her.

So state highway comes through by our house and had road gang working on it. Mama had six men stay at house an' some weeks would make as much as thirty or forty dollars. Howsomever big black boys settin' up to my sister an' soon she wus mar-

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ried an' moved off. My mama seem sorrowful. Now she say she is willin' to take sister back home with three children an' in delicate fix for 'nother one. Had 'nother letter from mama sayin' sister had come an' all wus gettin' on better. Thought sister could help her with work an' maybe ease misery in one foot.

Howsomever in few days got 'nother letter from my sister tellin' 'bout mama dyin' with flu. Captain won't give me no leave, can't go home. Always tellin' me he's gonna see what could he do. Never done it. Signified gonna take us to last camp befo' we goes over. Can't go home.

That old letter read 'bout dyin',
Boy, did you ever think about dyin',
Then I can't read it now for cryin',
Tears run down, Lawd, tears run down.

Make me think how mean I been, mean as hell I know. Jes' old Kid Bad workin' in me. Never meant no harm, jes' feel my hell a-risin', always some other place better'n this, some other work easier, road callin' me on. This old worl' been a hell to me ever since I left my mama's house. Now she's done dead an' gone, sleepin' in her grave, I want to go home, Lord, I want to go home. Funny

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how colored soldiers always wonderin' will they ever git back home to see sweet old mommer. Always singin' 'bout best friend in this world, somebody to tell trouble to. Then treat po' mother like fatherless child. I'm same way. Can't tell you reason why, can't name it. Must be me an' war same thing. Other boys same way, sorrowful an' blue, singin':

I'm gonna meet my mother,
I'm gonna meet my mother,
I'm gonna meet my mother,
Some day in promised land.

She stole away an' went to heaven,
She stole away an' went to heaven,
She stole away an' went to heaven,
Hope I join her in the band.

Soldiers got homesick blues, got far-away blues, got cemetray blues. Jes' set an' droop around, head hung down studyin'. Somebody would come round, tryin' to cheer 'em up. Wouldn't say nothin'. Can't see how other boys laughin' an' goin' on. Howsomer, don't do no good mopin' round, can't go home, jes' make matters worse.

Heap of boys skeered. Never seen much of world like I has, never been travelin' man. Skeered of

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ever'thing. Skeered poison gas in water, think German spies gonna blow 'em up at night. Wus skeered to put lights out at night, skeered to cross that big water, can't study nothin' but wantin' to go home, Lawd, wantin' to go home. Boys would git mad 'cause wus skeered an' would start joreein' an' cussin' an' bragging 'bout whut they gonna do on the other side.

If I gits skeered or blue would jes' roll 'cross my mind, "Well, goddamit, you got to do it, you got to luck it." Then I'd work myself up into rage, an' git to feelin' like myself again. War never got me, never will; got po' Hoof, won't git me.

One po' fellow guardin' bridge jumped off an' drowned hisself. Leastwise that's whut boys thought. Wusn't gittin' pay regular, didn't know why. Been 'bout three months an' sister would write such pitiful letters from home. Boy would jes' stare an' stare an' wouldn't talk. Sometimes would jes' break down an' cry like baby. Howsomer, heap of big boys would do that, wonderin' would they ever get back home. But this boy jes' couldn't stand it.

'Nother boy had jes' married little girl. Said she wus so little an' sweet wus nobody back home to

take keer of her. So this boy wus powerful sorrowful, weepin' an' moanin'. I would jes' have to carry him to camp with me. Would jes' cry like baby. Had big meetin' down at big A. M. E. church. White folks an' colored folks singin', prayin', talkin', tellin' us not to be skeered but to fight for our country. This boy says, damit, he ain't got no country, all he wants is his little girl.

Wus one big colored preacher talkin'. Had big black robe with white an' red stripes. Wus floppin' his arms like wings an' had big voice, hollerin', "Dears, bretherin judicious, also constituent, these be curious times. Oh-o-h-h, m-y L-o-r-d, will we be soldiers of the Cross, fightin' for my country? O-h, my L-o-r-d, what a privilege to fight in army of Lord." This little boy hollers up an' says parson can take his place, he don't want to be no soldier of Cross neither in army of Lord. Near'bout broke up meetin'.

'Bout that time captain forgot 'bout my meanness an' let me out of lockup an' ceased makin' me punishments. Must 'a' thought I wus po'-lookin' boy. 'Bout that time boys dyin' with flu like hogs with cholera back on Mister Tello's farm in Mississippi. Captain told me to drive truckload colored soldiers

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piled up dead; said thought that might keep me out o' meanness while. Lawd, never seen like since I been born.

Just behold what a number,
Lord, just behold what a number,
Just behold what a number,
From every graveyard.

I looks into the East,
I looks into the West,
Lord, I sees dead a-risin',
From every graveyard.

Look like judgment day. Folks dyin' back home an' writin' pitiful letters. Soldiers dyin' in camp. Boys sick in tents an' camp hospital. Hospital for sick, graveyard for dead. Couldn't count 'em, loaded 'em off in boxes. Never seen like since I been born.

That influenza, that influenza,
Come to lay yo' body down,
Oh, Lord, that influenza,
Come to lay yo' body down.

Onliest one thing help po' boys in time of trouble. Red Cross officers in camp an' Red Cross ladies back home wus whut done it. Officers would help out in camp an' would git white folks to help back

home. When my mama died an' captain won't let me go home, Red Cross man sends telegram. In 'bout two days he gits telegram back sayin' mama had good funeral, both white an' colored folks help-in', an' my sister wus well an' takin' keer of all folks. So I feels better an' havin' telegram work for me helps my feelin's a heap. Thought I would try to do better.

Some of boys, howsomever, ask Red Cross to do funny things. One boy wants to know can't Red Cross captain keep his wife from usin' money he sends home to keep up dam' black scoundrel settin' up to her. Wus dam' sweet back. 'Nother boy saved up all money he could git an' brings it in sayin' he wants white man to git ticket for his woman to go to France when boat sails. 'Nother boy wants Red Cross man to help him git leave to go home. Says nigger married his sweet mama an' he's gonna go home an' lay his body down. One big boy says since he left home an' come to army Lord done called him to preach; can't Red Cross captain git him exemption. Started right in to preachin' to show captain how could he preach an' pray. Nigger sho' covered hisself with eloquence. Boys always tryin' to git leave to go visit home on all times an' occasions.

WINGS ON MY FEET

Heard 'bout some boys askin' to go back home signifyin' wives or mothers needed 'em an' want to see 'em. Red Cross man would have letter from home-folks tellin' him didn't want 'em back, wus no-'count, good-for-nothin' loafers an' glad they wus in the army now. Thought money Uncle Sam sent home worth more than 'selves. One woman wrote letter signifyin' she wus gonna shoot husband if he comes back. So he stayed in army an' went overseas. Never did know whether got killed or not neither whether he ever got back home to see his lovin' wife. Wus fact, howsomever, heap of boys nothin' but loafers, an' bad men in home towns turn out to be good soldiers in army. Jes' natchelly liked it, jes' natchelly make good soldiers, talk about it.

'Bout that time thought I would try to do better. Would say to myself, damit, if I ain't patriot. Heard band play, got to marchin', buddies dyin' made me think maybe neither would I ever git back again. So I says to myself any man that is of this country got to go an' sacrifice his life. I got to do the same. I wus principled up like this, if I had to go I could do it. Wa'n't no hero, wa'n't no coward. I can do what I have to do. Got to luck it. If I'm gonna git killed I'm gonna git killed. Howsomever war never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me.

IX. Lord, I Want to Go Home

IX

LORD, I WANT TO GO HOME

THOUGHT they fooled us next time moved us to 'nother camp. Captain comes in sayin' to boys he's gonna send 'em back to Alabama an' he knows they's glad they don't have to go to France now. Some boys which been most skeered befo' now starts to hollerin' 'bout bein' sorry not goin' over to git Kaiser Bill, rarin' to go an' play war. Some boys, howsomever, seem mighty glad an' begin talkin' 'bout goin' back to sweet old Birmingham.

I was born in sweet old Alabam',
And I do not give a dam,
If I takes a toddy now and then,
Well, I'm goin' back, Lawd, I'm goin' back.

Big sargent comes by giving me wink an' says heap o' them boys never will see sweet old Alabam' no mo' 'cause they's leavin' for France this minute. Sho' 'nuf we goes straight to Long Island signifyin' we got to take boats soon as we can get ready. Boys changed tunes again tryin' all sorts an' kinds o' ways to see if they can't go back home.

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I ain't got no business in Germany
An' I don't want to go to France.
Lawd, I want to go home, I want to go home.

Had three days to wait for boat an' done most ever'-thing anybody ever done, gamble, drink, stew an' cuss, an' play bad in general. One thing, howsomever, was very pleasing to me. When we come to new place we run 'cross company of boys we been with befo' an' some boys come from same towns I been in and same places where I lived. Had good times talkin' 'bout old times an' whut happened since we seen one 'nother last time. So we got to talkin' and joreein' 'bout eve'ything.

"Say, old Roustabout, 'member time we got on train first time we wus leavin' for camp? Never seen such goin's on since I been born. Folks down to see us off, shoutin' an' laughin', some cryin' an' some talkin' big, an' some ain't sayin' nothin'. Boys struttin' round proud to be a soldier, talkin' 'bout gonna git Kaiser sho' as hell."

"Yes, Boy, sholy does remember. Men, women an' children, young an' old, black an' white, down to the station. 'Member old Spik wus one of fifteen chillun. Howsomever his mama wus 'bout worst one I seen. Jes' wouldn't let him go, hollerin' an'

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cryin', sayin', Lawd she wondered would her boy ever get back home. Train started an' she reach up an' grab boy's blouse, pulled shirt-tail out an' boy go hangin' on like brown monkey with tail on. Hee, hee, wa'n't that a funny sight?"

"Yes, Boy, remember that old gal of mine, weepin' an' goin' on, said she wus gonna follow me to camp. Swore she never did love nobody but her free an' easy papa. Said leavin' her daddy mighty hard to do. Neither wus she ever gonna leave me. Other folks better leave her lonesome daddy alone. I walks round tellin' her to get her a monkey man an' make him strut his stuff. Howsomever, I wus mighty sorry to leave.

"Lord, I got the blues can't be satisfied,
Brown-skin woman cause of it all,
If I git drunk who's gonna carry me home,
Brown-skin woman chocolate to the bone."

"Sholy does remember that girl. Seen her heap mo' times in Camp Gordon an' other places I been. Wus eve'ybody's sweet mama, done forgot all 'bout you. Wus long, tall, yaller gal always on road somewhere.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,
Never seen a woman a man could trust.

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If whisky don't get you,
Then cocaine must."

" 'Member one black boy did sho' 'nuf cry 'cause wouldn't let him go. Tried to do ever'thing he could to get by, but couldn't make it. Tried to sneak in but officers caught him. Po' boy down at station tears streamin' down his face. Wus pitiful-lookin' sight. Told me he went off an' got drunk an' raised hell. Thought preachers keep singin':

"King Jesus is a-ridin' an' I can't stay away,
Oh, Lord, King Jesus is a-ridin' an' I can't stay away;
Train done whistled an' cars done gone,
Ezekiel, I can't stay here by myself."

"Never will forget scenes till I die. Boys knowed they wus not goin' to France then. Wus gonna ride them cushions, settin' reared back. Thought they wus goin' to camp an' have good time.

"Gonna join army to git free clothes,
What war's about nobody knows.
Lord, I'm on my way."

"Thought we would wear fine uniforms, would sleep late, an' play big. Would go to town an' show off an' proud to name name of soldier. Thought police

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can't arres' us, gonna have one big time. Hee, h-e-a-w, didn't know nothin' 'bout whut wus comin'. 'Scusin' train wus comin' to carry us way from where we come from.

"Thought I heard that K. C. whistle blow,
Lord, she blow like she never blow befo',
Oh, Lord, she blow like she never blow befo'."

"Some of elders an' sisters prayin' for soldiers, prayin' for safe return. Some of old folks singin' gospel songs, crowdin' thick round station an' pushin' up to where train stop. Never seen such crowd since I been born, wors'n Satu'day crowd at circus or Sunday-evenin' crowd meetin' trains. Old folks thought must be old gospel train, carryin' soldiers in army of the Lord.

"I hear the train a-comin',
She's comin' round the curve,
She's loosened all her steam an' brakes,
An' strainin' every nerve;
Well get on board, little children,
For this old worl's rollin' away."

" 'Member me an' Shack-rouster Jim tellin' folks we had lives insured to one 'nother. We told 'em we gonna take crack at one 'nother so as to git insur-

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ance. So I says I'm gonna crack Shack-rouster off an' git his money an' come back home an' play bad with sweet mamas. Shack-rouster says, 'Yes, by God, any crackin' done he's gonna do it first.'

"Church songsters thought we wus ruffish boys. 'Bout that time train was comin', eve'ybody tryin' to git on board an' say good-by all same time, jumpin' on steps, pokin' heads out windows, standin' on platform, shoutin' an' hollerin', laughin' an' cryin'. Lawd, Lawd, I'm on my way, won't be long, Lawd, won't be long.

"Ezekiel said he spied the train a-comin',
We got on board an' she never stop runnin',
An' it just suit me, Lord, Lord,
It just suit me till I die."

"One thing crowd done for us at station wus to take up collection an' give boys spendin' money. Some boys down in aisle an' on knees rollin' bones, winnin' an' losin' 'fo' train gits good out of station. Old Spik, one of worst ones, jes' can't live without he's gamblin'. Could shoot penny or dollar, don't make no difference to him. But got to be rollin' them bones an' I'm gonna take his money from him.

"I gamble all over Kentucky,
Part of Georgia too;

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Everywhere I hang my hat,
Is home, sweet home, to me.
Baby, let the deal go down."

"Boys gamblin' all up an' down train, some settin' on flo', some in seats, some on platforms, rollin' them bones, Lawdy, shootin' them dices. Some boys lose all had befo' got to camp, some boys got pocket full o' money. Wus that way all time. Some boys would jes' natchelly win and some jes' natchelly lose. Didn't keer. Would be right back at it if ever got hold of a cent. Some big games I been in, talk about it. Tell you 'bout 'em in camp.

"Lose my watch an' lose my chain,
Loose everything but my gold diamond ring,
Come on, all you Birmingham scouts,
Put down yo' money on number six.
Baby, let the deal go down."

"'Member time train stopped at station and old Shorty nearly got left. Shorty wus talkin' big to some high brown lady an' didn't see train leavin', or 'scusin' he thought he would run an ketch up with it, showin' off to folks at station. Missed train with one hand, wus holdin' on with other han'. Train movin' faster an' faster, Shorty hollerin', 'Oh, Lordy, won't somebody pull me up?' Boys pulled him in an' had big laugh on him."

"Yes, Lawdy, I remembers Shorty. Way it wus boys would git off at every station. Would strut up an' down showin' off an' buyin' soft drinks an' smokin'. Havin' big times. You remember time big white man got to cussin' soldiers sayin' Uncle Sam ain't gonna have no dam' black bastards fightin' fer him? I ask him then, why the hell wasn't he wearin' uniform. Sholy near'bout got me but train pulled out an' so I gits away."

"Yes, Boy, remember 'nother station white man wus drunk, staggerin' round an' hollerin', yes, by God, Uncle Sam had plenty nigger soldiers to fight war fer him. White boys gonna stay home an' have good time."

"Sholy remember one dam' po' white trash hollerin' to crowd ought to take whole dam' train load nigger soldiers, load 'em on ship an' sink both ship and soldiers."

"Sho' wus funny world rollin' along. Train slow movin', takes long time to git to camp city. Boys got to sleepin' settin' up, lyin' down an' every other way like would have to do in France. Got grouchy an' quarrelin' an' fightin' befo' got to camp. Some boys already homesick. Want to go home, want to go home."

"Yes, 'member some of boys so skeered an' home-sick when we got to camp. Wus night-time an' boys never been 'way from home much. Maybe come from Georgia or Mississippi, maybe South Carolina, leastwise never seen much of worl' like us travelin' boys. Come in camp at night, seen long rows of lights, little houses flat an' look like ghost or sumpin'. Boys didn't know where they wus. Jes' skeered an' stare at camp and jump when officer tell 'em to do sumpin'. Would sholy do anything was told to do. 'Member time one boy thought he done got to Germany an' when tent fell down thought Germans done blowed it up? Officer laugh at him."

"Po' ole Geech wus that way. Remember time when he couldn't learn to salute. Would try, and would git mixed up. Wus northern officer thought he wus tryin' to be smart. Hit him 'cross head an' hurt boy badly. Got southern corporal an' he jes' laugh at Geech an' show him how to do it. Knowed he wus jes' green, jes' from country come to town. Howsomever, Geech's head got to hurtin' an' he got silver plate in head where he wus hit an' wus proud of it like boy with gold tooth. Got long rest an' offer to go to school. Never did know whut become of Geech, have you seen him?"

"No, I never seen Geech. Did you hear whut become of long tall boy called Spider Brown started off with us? He wus powerful funny boy. Would dance an' sing, and carry his box everywhere he went. Nobody couldn't git his banjo 'way from him. Love to play box like Spik love to shoot dices. Could step on it, wus some musicianer and songster. Wus big talker, too, but always singin' an' lookin' 'way off like wus seein' sumpin' couldn't tell 'bout."

"Yes, I seen Spider. Went with us to Jacksonville. Wus mighty sad case. Couldn't do nothin' with him. Got so homesick wouldn't eat, wouldn't drink, neither would he sleep. Said home-folks died. Wouldn't let him go home to funeral. Officer couldn't talk to him. Red Cross man couldn't do nothin' with him, jes' 'bout loses his mind, eyes stare an' look different. Worrination jes' got him. Officers would try everything. Couldn't do nothin' with him. Would cry an' holler. Give him box an' told him to sing. Didn't do nothin' but play an' sing homesick blues:

"Wish to God some old train would run,
Carry me back where I come from."

"Mighty sorry to hear 'bout po' Spider. Thought

a heap of that old boy. I seen other boys tryin' to get away, makin' excuses an' tryin' all sorts an' kinds o' tricks to get back home. Remember old boy called Gus Bigun, big boy from Mississippi? Well, Gus told 'em he couldn't hear nothin'. Couldn't prove he wus lyin'. Would ask him all sorts an' kinds of questions. Wouldn't open his mouth neither signify that he wus hearin' whut they ask. So one officer says to leave it to him an' he'll fix up this boy. So he does. They puts Gus in room where he can hear 'em talkin'. So they begins talkin' loud an' sayin', well, they is sorry but have to send Gus back home. Says he can't hear and don't want no deaf soldiers in army. So this officer goes in room where Gus is an' says right sudden like:

“‘Well, Gus, what you gonna do when you git home?’ An’ Gus he says, ‘I don’t know yet, Captain.’ So they puts him in labor battalion an’ first makes him work at hard labor for week.”

“Yeh, I knowed fellow like that. Swore he couldn’t hear nothin’ an’ was passin’ for deaf. Tried everything, talkin’ to him, askin’ him questions, coughin’ to see could he hear it. But fellow wus too smart for ‘em. So they sends him ‘way tellin’ one ‘nother

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they got to send him home. So one officer slips in an' whispers in his ear that handsome high yaller is waitin' outside to see him befo' he goes home. Feller grins like possum, an' so they got him too."

"I heard 'bout other boys tryin' all sorts an' kinds of ways to git out of army. Would play sick. Would tie rubber bands round legs to make 'em swell up. Would put soap under arms. Would smoke asthma tablets rolled up in cigarettes to see could they git fever."

"Likewise parents an' white folks would make excuses. One white woman hid colored boy off in swamp 'cause she wanted him to work on farm, couldn't do without him. One boy's father told officers he made boy get syphilis so he couldn't git in army. Doctor jes' laugh at him an' say that's what army is for to cure all sorts an' kinds diseases. Camp where I been officers jes' natchelly hard boiled, take 'em all, don't have no excuses."

"Did you hear about old boy called Enoch Hoop? Well, would jes' leave camp an' couldn't keep him from it. Maybe would slip out one way to-day an' 'nother way to-morrow. Would put on citizens'

clothes an' get away. Punished him same as other boys but couldn't stop him. So they filled up tank of water and put Enoch in tank. Then let water run in till gits nearly to his mouth. Then gives him thimble to scoop it up with. Howsomever water runnin' in faster than he can scoop it out. Boy gits skeered an' strangled an' begins hollerin', oh, Lordy, will he ever get out. But never cured him. Look for him to go A. W. O. L. when he gits on ship. Don't know how he's gonna do it but sholy look for him to git away with sumpin'."

"Yeh, we had big boy in one camp jes' like that. Jes' would slip out, like magic. Couldn't tell where he got out an' how he would git back. Tried all sorts punishment. So one time officer got man an' made him dig big grave. Stood over him with guns and made him dig his own grave. When got grave dug, made him stand up at end so would fall in it when firin'-squad shot.

"So gets six men with rifles lined up an' tells boy to git ready to tell his Jesus good mornin', 'cause he ain't got long to stay here. Boy swears he won't *never* leave no mo' without orders if they jes' spare his life. So lets him off. Never did aim to kill him 'cause all boys with guns wus on to trick. Howsom-

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ever, got that boy skeered one time. Asked him if he could run.

“Reached in pockets to get thirty-two
That soldier didn’t run, good God, he flew.”

“One of funniest things I ever seen wus in Camp Jackson. Train would switch cars up-hill an’ unload lumber so could build cantonments an’ tents. Hill wus so steep engine could push only one car up-hill at a time. Would puff, puff and huff, huff up-hill an’ leave car of lumber standin’ there to be unloaded. Would put on brakes an’ put lumber under wheels. One day eight boys was unloadin’, four upon car an’ four down ketchin’ lumber. So one boy moved lumber holdin’ car an’ brakes slip loose. So car started carrerrin’ down-hill. Look like wus runnin’ ’bout fohty miles hour an’ boys in car hollerin’ an’ yellin’. Car went ’bout three miles bein’ stopped ’cause it started up ’nother hill. So jes’ as boys ’bout to jump out, car started back down long run an’ boys have to ride all over again. One big boy jumped out in pile o’ sand, look like he been fightin’ in trench or sumpin’.”

“Well, old buddies, wonder did they move you to different camps like did us? Never did know why

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moved us so much. Howsomever, just suit me. 'Bout time I feels my hell a-risin' an' begin to git in so much meanness can't do nothin' with me, moves us on to 'nother town. Just suit me. Some camps I like better than others. Same as I do different towns I worked in. Make me think 'bout all towns I been in an' all jobs I worked at.

"When left Nashville moon ~~wus~~ shining bright,
When we got to Memphis ~~was~~ broad daylight,
We goin' back to Nashville to git our hambones broiled,
'Cause these Memphis women sho' is lettin' 'em spoil."

"Had some good times in camp. Told about some already. Would enjoy Sunday. Maybe wake up hearin' band play, make us think we ~~wus~~ wakin' up in the Kingdom. Would dress up an' set round an' have good dinner. 'Member old big-eatin' Jo Jo? Well, sholy ~~wus~~ funny seein' big-eatin' Jo Jo, by golly, tryin' to git satisfied eatin' hardtack, ho, ho, ho! Or maybe tryin' to smoothe out wrinkles in empty belly with slice o' bread so thin could see through it. On Sunday ~~would~~ eat so much skeered of whut might happen to him. All same to him, never did hurt him. Boys would set around an' smoke an' argue an' joree and git off to go to town see sweet mama. Sometime I like camp better'n

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work on construction gang. Maybe had better clothes, better grub, keep body mo' healthier. But I ain't free, Lord, I ain't free.

“When I git lazy an’ want to lay off,
Can’t have no talk with the walkin’ boss;
Oh, Lord, I want to be free, want to be free,
Rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.”

X. Roll 'Em, Soldier, Roll Them Dice

X

ROLL 'EM, SOLDIER, ROLL THEM DICE

Boys had to stay in camp on Long Island few days befo' left to git on board ship. Look like never would git started. Nothin' much to do an' crowd mighty restless. Wouldn't let 'em off to go to city. All we seen of New York this trip was marchin' from train down to git on board. So boys had plenty rollin' games, skin games, poker, black jack, thirty-one. But had small pay, nothin' to gamble with. So would gamble for cigarettes, chewing tobacco, an' anything from penny up. But these games nothin' like big games we had back in camps after pay-day, neither like big games in France, neither like games comin' back on ships. Them wus some gamblin', rollin' boys, sometimes maybe more'n two hundred games goin' on one time on deck an' in different places. Talk about it.

Roll them bones, roll 'em on the square,
Roll 'em on sidewalk, street, or anywhere.
Roll 'em in evenin', roll 'em at night.
Roll 'em when captains all out o' sight.

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Howsomever, thought I would tell boys 'bout time I won nine hundred dollars one night in two games in one camp. Way it wus, boys had been paid off an' jes' natchelly got to roll them bones. Started 'bout seven o'clock one night. We wus in barrack, all down on floor. Some wus propped up on boxes like squirrel, some squattin' like pet bear doin' monkey tricks, some kneelin' down like preacher at big meetin', some lyin' on stomach like sister jus' come through with religion. But this wa'n't no revival meetin' 'scusin' boys wus doin' heap o' shout-in'. But shoutin' to them bones what I'm tellin' 'bout.

My baby needs new pair shoes,
How am I gonna buy 'em if I lose?
Gonna roll them dice, ain't gonna lose,
Gonna buy my baby them new pair shoes.

My chilluns on ground, my wife out o' work,
Come on, dices, don't you shirk,
So come, you seven; bones, will you 'leven,
Gonna shoot them dice, gonna shoot 'em in heaven.

Well, 'bout fourteen boys all could git round game at one time. Howsomever when one boy git broke others come in. Must 'a' been 'bout fifty in first game befo' we got stopped. Started off with penny,

ROLL THEM DICE

then run it up to two cents, then round up to fo', then made it five cents. Would rise from five cents to twenty cents mo' which would make it quarter. Then we add 'nother quarter an' bid fifty cents straight. Then we raised from fifty cents till we wus bettin' dollar flat. Boys gittin' broke, other boys comin' in biddin' two an' three dollars. Wus tight game but that's where I made my sheer, that's where I got *well*. Must 'a' made 'bout seventy-five dollars in that game an' so moved on to big game.

Chuck a luck, sickely splup,
Mo' you lay down, mo' you pick up.
Told you once, told you twice,
You can't git to heaven rollin' my dice.

So come to real game. Started with three dollars an' raise to six. Boys git hot, gonna raise 'em high. Some boys got broke an' steps out of game. So hot, howsomever, jes' got to git back in. Jes' can't help it. Thinks they gonna win next time, actual fact can't stop 'em.

Lost hind leg in poker game,
Come on, bones, an' treat me nice
Pasteboard game too dam' tame,
Roll 'em, soldier, roll them dice.

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Feel like they's lucky. Feel prosperous. Feel like can make big plus money. Some boys git so angry got to git back in. Jump in head first, tryin' to win, lose but always tryin' again. So heap o' boys church fellows don't play an' bein' friends lend other boys money to come back in game. So first one boy gits broke an' 'nother one comes in, till all git broke. That's how I gits so much money an' cleaned up mo'n nine hundred dollars in 'bout six hours. I'm big splash, can century if I have to do it.

Horse an' flea an' couple o' mice,
Settin' in corner shootin' dice,
Horse slip up an' fell on flea,
Flea say ain't that a horse on me.

Because I'm a gamblin' man I gits blues when I can't git to gamblin' game. Worried in my mind if I can't see them rollin' bones. Because I'm gamblin' man when I die place deck o' cards on my chest, pretty pair dice at bottom of my feet. Therefore you know I'm a gamblin' man an' sweet old game will be with me after I'm gone an' dead in my grave. Skin games first, women next, but if I can't git no skin game, don't want no women at all. Lord, I love yellow girl, I love black ones too, also I love medium brown. But I love my skin game better than I love myself.

ROLL THEM DICE

Come, you that love to skin,
Pick out yo' cards to win,
If you put down an' lose one time,
Put right down an' lose again.

Some boys jes' will git mad an' quarrel. Can't bluff me 'cause I'm a gamblin' man. I tells 'em to win, god-damit, I don't keer how much they git. "I comes here to lose or win," I tells 'em, "I don't keer which. If you don't want to lose why bet yo' money. Put down, damit, I don't keer. Win one thousand dollars an' won't bother me.

"Money in bank, money in sight,
Sho' keep down devil of a fight."

Fellow says, "That's all right, I'll git you next time."

"I know that, Son," I says, "but I got you now. That's main thing. Bird in hand worth mo'n fo' floppin' in bush."

"Well, by God, that's not way I treat you when I wins little plus money. You full o' prunes, can't nobody tell you nothin'."

"Well, that's all right, Son, I got this money now,

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ain't I? And I'm gonna keep, ain't I? I'm gonna century jes' one mo' time if last thing I do."

"All right, you jes' keep on an' I'm gonna take that money 'way from you. If you can read letter you can read news. See it on front page I'm gonna take that money 'way from you."

"Well, if you do, gonna be with thirty-eight, an' ain't no one man never got me yet. I got to die some day, so ain't nothin' between us, come on an' do it.

"Grass is green, ground is hard
I'm the rooster in this yard.
So long, nigger, so long I say,
You don't git none o' my money till nex' pay-day."

Boys wonder how I win. Don't know myself 'scusin' look like I'm jes' mo' lucky. Carry rabbit foot an' buckeye an' anything I can git. Don't know if this gives me luck. Some say it do. Howsomever, also I got me little sack full o' winnin' powder carries with me all time. Never tell nobody all about how I fixes it up. Can tell some of things in it. Mix-up whut makes strong luck, mixtry is whut does it. Maybe I goes off an' gets some roots. Maybe Sampson's snakeroot, maybe some Eve an' Adam roots,

some John the Conqueror, some lowbush mercury, with plenty of loadstone. Puts this together, dries it off, grinds it up an' puts into piece of flannel. Then puts heart's cologne all over it an' makes it smell like luck. I says to boys I know they wants some but ain't nothin' cookin' whut they smell.

Don't like my peaches, don't shake my tree,
Stay out o' my orchard, let my peach trees be.

Howsomever, I never could keep money I win. Would blow it in an' be rarin' for 'nother big game. Jes' soon as I win that nine hundred dollars stopped my gamblin'. Soon as I loose it all increase my eagerness for gamblin' again. Thought I would wreck camp 'cause I was breakin' every creature whut drew breath toward a card. I would even git down on my knees an' pray to the good Lord to help me win every game I play.

"Oh, Lord," I would say, "help me to be successful in shootin' dice an' winnin' plenty o' money, 'cause, Lord, you knows I needs it. And oh, Lord, if you help me git over this fence this time, I'll drag across next one by myself." So I feels lucky.

Blowed all that money in maybe in jes' 'bout a

WINGS ON MY FEET

week. Drinkin' good whisky, moonshine, beer, home brew, gin, L. W. H. an' anything I could git. Jes' wouldn't quit. Wouldn't even stop to look back. Rentin' cars, havin' car full o' women. Cost me twenty-twenty-five dollars eve'y time I went out. I wus big Ike. Eve'ytime they say, "I wish I had," I say, "Here, by God, it is." I was big man, rich man. Didn't feel no way worried till last dollar was gone. That's time hell started crawlin' on my head. When I seen my last dollar gone. Talk 'bout upsetted man, worried man, I was it, didn't know my feet from my head, jes' starin' an' thinkin' what un-ignorant fool I wus to be blowin' in my money.

Every time girls start quarrelin' I say, "Here, girls, have a drink," signifyin' I wanted them to forgit troubles. Or give 'em dollar jes' to stop 'em from fightin'. Sho' had lovin' a plenty. Thought I wus settin' on top of worl'. Found myself sinkin' into hell, rattlin' 'long like dry bones gonna rise again. 'Bout that time moved us on up to Long Island gettin' ready to go on ship.

Left Sweet Mama in kitchen
Cookin' pork an' beans,
Lovin' Daddy's on the ocean
Dodgin' submarines.

ROLL THEM DICE

Was one boy got religion an' thought he had to go to preachin' after he got to Long Island camp. Got in tent one night an' had 'bout twenty homesick boys singin' an' shoutin'. Wus singin' old-time religion an' preachin' gettin' ready for judgment day. Makin' such a racket officer goes round an' stops 'em. Howsomever other boys don't pay 'em much mind.

Preacher in pulpit jumpin' up an' down,
Soldiers in pup tent singin' Alabama bound.

So boys wus mighty ruffish an' would go round preacher singin' an' joreein'. One song wus if want to go to heaven, then by God, better grease head with mutton stew, take St. Peter by the hand, an' slide right into promised land. 'Nother one like it told boys to grease all over with brunswick stew and when devil grab you would miss his man, so could slip right over in promised land. Boys jes' naturally rough 'cause thought they wus gonna meet death anyway, done sold their souls to devil. Would walk around singin':

If you want to go to heaven when you die,
Well, Lord, then put on collar an' tie;
If you want to go to heaven when you die,
Oh, Lord, he-i-a-ya, put on collar an' tie.

WINGS ON MY FEET

Howsomever time come when ordered us to get ready. Ordered fine dress parade. Look like wus gonna go into battle. Some boys thought Germans done come over in submarine. Thought wus goin' into battle. Howsomever, wus only gettin' ready to march down streets of New York in parade. So put us on train an' made quick trip. Got off train an' marched down side street. Then marched off to meet 'nother company, some white an' some colored soldiers.

Thought they had wonderful bands playin', peoples linin' up side of streets, wavin' flags an' shoutin'. Band kept playin', peoples kept comin'. Boys marchin' feelin' like patriots, gonna be citizens when they come back. Singin' songs like all soldiers:

Good-by, Broadway, hello, France,
We're ten million strong.

Thought about African army my mama's papa told us 'bout. Lord, thought about it. Thought 'bout Yankees fightin' Colonel Sanders wus Marster to my mama's papa and mama. Thought about army of the Lord, heard my mama singin' 'bout, been in army of Lord all her life. Folks seem like mighty proud

ROLL THEM DICE

of colored soldiers an' cheered 'em mo'n white.
Thought me an' army buddies now.

So boys thought they wus glad they wus in the
army now. Forgot 'bout troubles. Lookin' at big
buildings, listenin' to peoples cheerin', marchin'
straight an' feelin' good. Never seen so many col-
ored folks since I been born 'scusin' one time I been
to New York befo'. Look like I'm gonna git to be
soldier an' go over in spite of all my meanness. Be
on boat in little while.

'Bout that time we turns off near shippin' dock.
Thought my feets froze to ground again. Can't be-
lieve my eyes. Got them crazy blues comin' on me,
can't be satisfied, gonna have them chain-gang
blues. Oh, my Lord, seen that dam' black nigger
preacher killed po' Hoof. Feel my hell a-risin'.
Don't know if I'm skeered or mad as hell. Got them
fightin' blues, gonna git that dam' nigger if I never
gits on boat. So I gives yell worse'n corn-field hol-
ler I used to have, grabs my gun, gits ready to stick
nigger with bayonet an' jumps through crowd yell-
in' like devil or sumpin'.

I been doin' all this so quick till corporal an' offi-
cers don't know whut's happenin'. Folks in crowd

WINGS ON MY FEET

skeered, runnin' this 'way an' that. Missed that nigger preacher but I'm gonna git his dam' skin yet if last thing I do. Big colored policeman comes up tryin' to stop me an' I hits him over head. Ain't gonna have no nigger 'restin' me. Howsomever officers done got me an' takes me back in line an' asks me what the hell's matter. Told me thought I wus gonna do better. Maybe have to shoot me yet. So I tells them, "Well, by God, the thing to do then is to do it, goddam, 'cause I'm gonna git that black scoundrel sho' as hell." Officers wink an' say, well, come on, see can't I git Kaiser's skin.

XI. I'm on My Way an' Can't Turn Back

XI

I'M ON MY WAY AN' CAN'T TURN BACK

So WE went on board ship. Some boys skeered to go, some don't keer, some rarin' to git over. Say they gonna git Kaiser if he's over there. Some boys never seen so many ships neither, ships so big can load trains on 'em an' put mo' black boys in 'em than all colored folks in home towns where boys come from. Some boys never seen so much water, neither have they been on big wide ocean. Boys askin' whether is waves gonna stay smooth or rise up rough. Some boys still starin' at big tall buildings an' don't know where they is, neither where is they goin'. Chaplain colored captain tell boys good old ship of Zion gonna take 'em safely to other side.

What ship is that will take us to other side?
Good old ship of Zion, hallelujah.
She has landed many a thousand,
She can land as many more,
Hallelujah, good old ship of Zion.

Thought I would cheer boys up too. Gittin' on boat wus nothin' new to me. I been on river boats an'

WINGS ON MY FEET

been in navy ridin' storm an' moverin' from shore to shore. I been travelin' man, sho' God travelin' now. I been to New York befo', seen ships comin' an' goin'. Been 'cross waters one time, didn't mean to go. Now I'm gettin' on board big ship again. Me an' war same thing. Maybe I don't want to go, maybe I do, don't make no difference. I'm principled up like this, I can do what I have to do. Got to luck it. If war gonna git me, gonna git me; if ain't gonna git me, ain't gonna git me. Howsomer, war never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me. Leastwise

I'm on my way an' I can't turn back,
Lord, I'm on my way an' I can't turn back.
Don't you grieve after me.

So I tells boys 'bout time I calls myself King Stevadora. Way it wus I started as stevadora an' work up till I knowed heap 'bout ships. Could fire 'em, could dismantle life-boats an' work davits to ketch up life-boats in stormy sea. Never could be good sailor, howsomever, like white boys. So I quits jes' soon as I can git back to shore. So I tell boys big tales 'bout what happen in days I been on sea befo'. Been some sea-farin' boy myself, only told big tales mo'n I really done. Talk about it, Lawd, talk about it.

I'M ON MY WAY

Went to the sea, didn't go to stay,
Got so drunk couldn't git away,
Ain't been sober since last October,
Lord, an' I can't tell reason why.

So I tells 'bout time endurin' war befo' Uncle Sam got in it. Wus heap of foreign vessels in harbors. Sometimes couldn't git men to work on 'em. Wus one French vessel in Savannah had captain an' engineers, an' maybe mates but had to have some mo' men for firemen or seamen. Didn't know how to git 'em so shanghaied eight boys.

Wus this way. French captain lookin' for men sees me struttin' round an' tells me he wants eight men. Says jes' wants 'em to take ship to Jacksonville an' will pay boys six dollars apiece and railroad fare back. Asks me can I git him eight men, 'scusin' can't have no married men. So I goes out an' finds men. Boys say, sho' they go to Jacksonville, jes' one-day run from Savannah an' easy money. Some boys say they's married but don't keer, wants easy money an' good trip. Good Lawd, tell him we ain't married, we gonna make that trip.

So I brings in eight men. French captain tells 'em he ain't had time to fix up articles for 'em to sign, signifyin' he knows he has to have articles so men

WINGS ON MY FEET

can sign to go on boat, so captain can pass inspectors. So he tells boys jes' sign on blank page an' he will fill in 'nother time. So boys sign but didn't know they wus signin' real paper, which was folded back so couldn't see it. So we starts out an' goes all that night an' so nex' mornin' boys come out an' puts on citizen clothes sayin' they soon be at Jacksonville and goin' on shore. But captain tells 'em got to work little while longer, ain't got to Jacksonville yet.

So boys sailed that day an' night, an' next day an' night an' still don't see no Jacksonville. So captain tells 'em he' strange Frenchman an' takes him longer to git to places than if he knowed way like American would. 'Bout that day, howsomever, we tells captain we ain't gonna work for no six dollars. Knowed sumpin' wus wrong. So captain says that's all right, go ahead, boys, he'll pay us regular ship wages an' six dollars. Says he's lost, maybe he find Jacksonville some day. Boys feelin' like hell, hollerin'.

Well, I don't know but think I will
Go on down to Jacksonville.
Lord, let yo' light shine on me.

So on fo'th day we sees lights an' boys begin holler-

in' 'bout bein' in sight of Jacksonville, soon be comin' in. Come to find lights wus lights of big ship Leeviathun which we wus passin' in ocean. So captain sends first mate down an' tells us to come up on deck, wants to see us. So we goes up an' there stands captain, mates, chief engineer, all with big pistols buckled up round 'em, skeered us boys gonna raise hell when we find out whut's happened to boat an' us. So we is skeered too 'cause we knows sumpin' is wrong. So captain says, "Well, boys, ain't no use foolin' you no longer. Boys, we's on way to France an' gonna be comin' in 'fo' long."

So one or two boys breaks down cryin', "Oh, Lordy, my wife an' children don't know where I is, what will I do. Oh, Lordy, what will I do?"

So captain says, "Well, boys, I'll stop ship an' let you git off, ef'n you insist. Told you I didn't want no married men; done it you'selves. Tell you whut I'll do; jes' soon as we gits to France, I'll cable money back to folks an' pay regular ship wages."

So I seen wus nothin' to do 'bout it. I can do what I have to do an' other men got to do same. Leastwise, I'm havin' good time an' don't never stay in no one place mo'n three weeks leastwise mo'n fo'.

So I tells him that will be all right, will be satisfaction to me an' I tells other men to do the same. So men got satisfied an' we got to France. Still captain had to keep watchmen to keep us from gittin' out.

Howsomever, I told boys 'bout gittin' out an' havin' hell of a good time an' they would have good time when they gits to France, so no need to be cryin' an' goin' on like babies or jes' like boys green an' don't know nothin'. Told 'em 'bout slippin' out one night an' got in with colored fellow showed me sho'-'nuf good time. Then got lost, couldn't talk no French an' finally found American ship brought me back to Norfolk. Went to work and travelin' again an' been travelin' till army got me, where I now is.

So 'bout that time ship wus movin' out to sea an' heard mighty shoutin' an' hollerin'. Come to find out two boys done jumped overboard. Jes' 'bout gone crazy, thought war wus more than ocean, death wus in front. Seamens got 'em out, howsomever, an' made good soldiers.

So boys gits to feelin' better, sayin' glad to be goin' over. I starts yodelin' my corn-field holler, walkin' 'bout an' actin' like monkey again. Boys watchin'

big tall buildin's back in city, lookin' at Statute of Liberty and boats comin' an' goin', some little boats, some big boats, all sorts an' kinds.

"Hey, boy, look at that little boat snoopin' 'long, look like old razor-back hawg slippin' through blackberry bushes down in South Georgia. Lawd, look at him run."

"Yeh, look at that big old ship a-moverin', Lawd, moverin' 'long. Look jes' 'zactly like big blue-ribbon bull captain had at Fair in Jackson one time."

"Dam' lie, look prezactly like race hoss stretchin' his legs in sweet old Louisville. Lawdy, look at little ship tied on to big fellow, look jes' like lead mule, rollin' them wheelers, Lord, let them wheelers roll."

Told my captain my hands wus cold.
Goddam you' hands, let wheelers roll.

"Look at them two 'stroyers trottin' 'longside this big old boat. Look like pair iron-gray mare mules in Tennessee. Gonna hitch 'em up an' break em' to work double. Rarin' to go, skittish as hell, hard tail streaks o' lightning."

WINGS ON MY FEET

"Dam' lie, look precisely like two big greyhounds runnin' on race-track in Miami."

Went down to Miami to see my friend
In come greyhound burnin' the wind.

Wus white boy on ship mannin' big gun boys called Slim. Could shoot like Ole Man Bad hisself. Could hit anything. Would keep lookout for submaroons an' shoot 'em fo' they could git us. Wus quick as yellow lightning. One day boys gittin' little sick an' wus one boy had bunk right under gun carriage. Boy was hollerin', oh, Lordy, won't somebody come an' help him befo' he dies. Got awful pains in his belly, can't live. So boys tryin' to help him anyway could. Thought I would git cool drink water for him befo' he died, Lawd, befo' he died. So I wus climbin' down from up over boy from 'nother bunk with glass water in my hand.

'Bout that time Slim lets go big gun, *bam, boom, boom*, shakin' ship like goddam, throwin' me down on sick boy, spillin' water all in his face. Boys think gun goin' off is submaroon done torpedoed ship. Viveration of gun feel like ship been hit. Sick boy runnin' like rabbit, never had no mo' pain. Other boys pourin' out of hatches like black smoke. Streamin' up on deck, sumpin' gotta be done 'bout

it. So begin shuttin' hatches on boys' heads, knock-in' 'em down like flies. Boys hollerin' an' shoutin', gittin' axes an' hammers an' tryin' to bust open hatches an' hollerin', "Oh, Lordy, won't somebody let me out befo' I die."

Never seen like since I been born. Wus this way. Slim seen old boat been sunk an' big hull risin' an' fallin' on waves look precisely like submaroon gettin' ready to go under an' gonna shoot torpedo at us. Old Slim never took no chances. Fust time boys had been on board when big gun shoot an' so thought ship done blowed up, Lawdy, Lawd. 'Noth-er time Slim hauled 'way an' shot floatin' barrel into million pieces, thought it mus' be submaroon. One time shot at Pampas fish. That old Slim won't take no chances.

So boys wus gittin' 'customed to big gun shootin' an' submaroons missin' us. Thought I already told you 'bout one time when torpedo near'bout got us an' boys got to prayin' an' singing. So boys got to thinkin' big ship an' big guns could save 'em from anything. 'Cause they wus up above water, on big ships, an' with big guns, wa'n't skeered no mo'. So one day seen sho'-nuf submaroon an' guns begin firin'. Boys rush up on deck an' holler an' shout jes'

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like baseball game or football game or maybe two boys in ring fightin'.

"Hit 'im that time. Lawd, Lawd, that shot got 'im. Look at him sink, go git him, Slim. Touchdown, army, touchdown, army, Lawdy, watch 'em go."

Boys jes' natchelly didn't have no sense, ain't skeered of nothin' now, whilst little while ago skeered of everything. Some boys gittin' rifles an' boastin' 'bout how they gonna shoot hell out of any submaroon come pokin' head up where they can see it. Nothin' to do but officers have to run boys back down in ship, too many of 'em, shoutin' an' hollerin' an' makin' ship top-heavy and gittin' in way.

Heap o' funny things happen. Take me till tomorrow night to tell about 'em. Told 'bout some already. Some happen to me myself. Thought I would tell folks 'bout it when I got back. Thought 'bout my marchin' an' cuttin' up when I was little boy. Thought 'bout fightin' tribes of Africa. Thought it wus funny me bein' on shipboard shootin' at submaroon an' fightin' in army of Uncle Sam. I'm struttin' my stuff feelin' my hell a-risin'. I can do what I have to do. I can luck it anywhere I go.

I'M ON MY WAY

So I wus struttin' round, high steppin' and pokin' plate or cup or whatever I had to git supper in, an' so poked plate full o' supper in when I'm supposed to poke in coffee cup. Pours coffee in plate an' tells me why'n hell don't I pass on. I starts to go back an' git mo' an' man pokes me in pants with bayonet. So I has to eat slop for supper. So I says that's all right, I'm like corn says to tomato, "I'll see you in soup," signifyin' I'll be there for nex' meal.

Great big soldier settin' in bed
Wished, by God, had shortenin' bread.

Howsomever when next meal comes I'm all set and climbin' up steep ladder, boys pilin' up after me. So I has plate all full an' coffee an' everything for good meal when, *bam*, *bam*, some fool climbs too close and hits my heel makin' me spill all food I had. So I has to git somebody to divide wid. Me can't go back, Lawd, can't go back. So I misses two meals.

So 'bout that time boys gittin' mighty sick like I told about. Some sicker than others, some banterin' sickest boys, maybe sayin', well, hospital fer sick, graveyard for dead. Maybe would sing songs an' joree:

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Went down to sea, sea look so wide,
Thought about my honey, hung my head an' cried.

Howsomever, like I told 'bout storm comin' up, boys gittin' sicker. Some begin to sing an' some begin to pray' an' one old boy says, well, goddam, to let boat sink, he don't keer. Some boys jes' groan an' holler, skeered of sea, skeered of war, skeered of storm, skeered of submaroon, wonderin', Lawd, will people back home ever see 'em again. Oh, Lord, don't believe we gonna make it. Oh, Lord, ship's a leakin', waves runnin' high as two-story buildin', washin' boys an' plates 'cross decks. Boys sicker than they ever has been.

Oh, Lord, if I die, throw my body in sea,
Where whales an' fishes make a fuss over me.
Oh, Lord if I had wings like po' moanin' dove,
I'd fly 'cross ocean an' light on girl I love.

Like I was tellin', howsomever, we got across an' lands from boat. Takes us 'bout three miles to barracks an' thought we would rest a while. Found town wet an' sloppy like hell. Couldn't speak no French, couldn't git money changed, boys gittin' homesick blues. 'Bout this time found some West India boys, good scouts, 'scusin' charged us heap o'

money to take us round an' talk French an' make right change.

So we made friends with West India boys an' started havin' good times. Would take us into places where white folks wus. Some of boys look like skeered rabbits, 'bout to run. Would say they skeered to go in, expectin' to be run out an' maybe lynched or sumpin'. West India boys jes' laugh at 'em an' tell 'em to come on in. French treated us fine, better than we had been treated befo'.

'Bout first, leastwise second time, I ever been up in French town, wus standin' on corner. Felt somebody pullin' on my arm. So I jumps like wus policeman or somebody. Somebody pullin' on other arm. I jumps again. Good-god-a-mighty, wus two French white ladies. Good Lord, wus skeered to look 'round to see if some white man gonna knock hell out o' me. Them French girls too bright for me.

Heard other boys tellin' 'bout first time went to towns in England. Said children would run from colored soldiers an' hide behin' wall or fence or sumpin'. Either they wus skeered of colored folks else wanted to see whut they look like. Boys said folks had told funny tales 'bout Negroes. Actual fact, some folks would pull blouse to see if colored

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men had tails. Been told wus like monkeys, jes' didn't know better. French heap better than that an' treat colored soldier like man.

Boys didn't have long to rest. Whilst we wus engineers battalion, still they made us go back an' help stevedora battalions unload boats. Some of boys had been stevedoras anyhow and wus needed to unload ships in hurry so soldiers an' supplies an' ammunition could be unloaded an' ships could go back for mo' soldiers. Likewise 'stroyers had to come in an' git supplies an' coal had to move in them days. So boys would march in 'bout six o'clock every mornin' an' unload ships befo' they got to regular work of buildin' railroad front lines.

So one day wus call from ship at sea carryin' naval stores. Thought ship was on fire an' wanted somebody to help. Wus merchant ship in dock, captain and engineers aboard but liberty had been given to crew. Had to have men. So took nineteen of us boys out to sea 'bout seventy miles to save burnin' ship. Lawdy, Lawdy, had a hard time. Talk about it. Look like maybe war gonna git me yet. Howsomever, war never got me, never will.

I got rainbow tied round my shoulder,
Wings hitched on my feet,
I'm on my way an' can't turn back.

XII. Hitch My Mules to Hindenburg Line.

XII

HITCH MY MULES TO HINDENBURG LINE

SO AFTER we landed in France took us to barracks 'bout three miles from town. Told us we would have to build railroad in few days an' would take us up near battle-front sector. Howsomever, first made us march back to town every day an' help stevedoras unloadin' ships. Wus such a hurry at that time. So we would unload ships with cars an' engines, an' guns an' ammunition an' supplies an' coal an' eve'y other kind of thing sent over to war. Sometimes would see shiploads of soldiers comin' in with big band playin' an' jes' stop an' stare after 'em. Lawdy, Lawdy, had some mighty fine bands.

So one day near 'bout quittin' time we gets message wus big ship all loaded with naval stores burnin' up an' callin' for help. Thought rosin an' turpentine an' tar wus burnin' mighty fast an' boat wus in deep trouble. Thought wus storm comin' up an' wind fannin' fire like devil. Wa'n't no ship to go help 'em 'scusin' merchant ship jes' unloaded. Howsomever, this ship had granted liberty to crew for few hours. So didn't have seamen 'nuf to man ship.

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So took 'bout nineteen of us boys an' two foremen and started out to help burnin' ship. Wus high sea an' storm comin' up. Boys didn't know whut was gonna happen.

Reached burnin' ship jes' after one hatch blowed up killin' six men. Life-boats wus fillin' up an' captain an' wife near'bout got caught in fire. Biggest fire anybody ever seen, red flames an' black smoke, wind blowin'. Wus skeery sight out on deep, wide ocean. So rescued captain an' wife. Some already bein' in life-boats floatin' round maybe two or three, maybe five miles apart. Saved fo' boatloads, but never did find fifth. Had hard time savin' all in boats. Way it wus, we would dismantle life-boats on merchant ship from davits an' slide to one side.

Sinner-man, row yo' boat one side,
'Cause you can't git to heaven on ebbing tide.

Then would pick up life-boats floatin' from burnin' ship with davits and get folks on board. Wus rough sea an' had hard times. So for'mens would holler to start song, dam it, so could pull hard an' forgit 'bout rollin' waves.

So we sung old spiritual. Captain's wife had fainted an' when we pulled life-boat up they took her in-

side an' worked with her. So she comes to self whilst boys is singin' outside, pullin' up second boat. Thought she wus in heaven lyin' down. Heard angels singin':

This old ship's reelin' an' rockin',
Makin' for the promised land;
She's loaded with many a thousand,
Makin' for promised land.

Howsomever, boys havin' hard times pullin' up boats heavily loaded. For'men yellin' at 'em, some cussin'. Got to have better song to pull by. So when lady hears swearin' an' hollerin' an' next song finds out she ain't in heaven. Boys jes got to heave-a-hora-harder, singin' old song, didn't know white lady wus name Mamie.

Oh, big-legged Mamie, ho,
Oh, big-legged Mamie, pull, ho,
She's nice little lady, ho,
I'm gonna slip to her house, ho,
Oh, I'm gonna slip to her house, ho,
'Cause she fix such a good dinner, ho,
Lawd, 'cause she fix such good dinner, ho,
Oh, little Mamie, ho-ho,
Big-legged Mamie, ho.

So after that we goes on huntin' up other life-boats,

WINGS ON MY FEET

maybe one of 'em we found cruisin' off six miles.
So we saved all in four boats an' kept lookin' fer
fifth boat. Wus mighty proud we saved so many,
sorrowful if we can't find last boat. Must 'a' turned
over an' drowned all on board.

Lord, out on that ocean,
That deep wide ocean,
That boat is sinkin' down.

So we comes on back and gives us little rest. Then
starts unloadin' boats again. Would march in col-
umns to ships in morning, then march back in
evenin'. Sometimes would sing, sometimes wouldn't.
On short marches would sing regular army songs,
all sorts an' kinds, same as white soldiers. Maybe
would be singin', "Pack up your troubles in your
old kit bag." Howsomever, when boys quits singin'
an' goes marchin' on, *hep, hep, step, step*, sun 'bout
goin down, homesick blues comin' over me an' I jes'
natchelly got to holler,

O-h-L-o-r-d, e-e-a-i-y-e-a-h, L-a-w-d-y-L-a-w-d,
Oh, where shall I go for to ease my troubles in mind?

Sholy could unload them ships in record time. Told
us took them Frogs an' Britishers 'bout week to un-

HINDENBURG LINE

load boat of coal whilst we start like six o'clock one mornin', an' be done twelve o'clock that night, an' old ship be moverin' out to sea again. Got to do it. Got to let other boats in. Uncle Sam ain't sayin' why ain't we done it, but is you unloaded that boat? Way it wus, Britishers unload coal by baskets, we unload it with derricks. Would have big derrick an' each derrick have big dip bucket fitted on to winch. Each fo' men would have two dip buckets each one holdin' maybe half-ton. One be goin' up full an' one be goin' down empty, kept old winch cryin' out all time, b-r-r-r—b-r-r-rrrrr.

Well, baby, I ain't no miller, neither miller's son,
But can do yo' grindin' till miller come,
Ain't nobody's business but my own.

Could unload other ships easier'n coal. Would start unloadin' by movin' back cargo hatches with ship derrick. Ship would have maybe six hatches. Would have maybe somewhere round twenty men in hold, an' fo' men on deck over hatch, two handlin' fall an' two signals. Then 'bout twenty-five men on dock with trucks at each hole. One man be standin' by winches all time windin' up an' down. Winchman gits signals an' boys can't sing much; got to be 'tendin' to signals. Ships with side ports would un-

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load with trucks. Had hooks an' chains. Chains had lugs could ketch axles of trucks.

Howsomever, boys with trucks whut do move would have motor trucks an' hand trucks an' know how to run 'em. Seen boys git load on hand truck an' shove 'em an' ride 'em hundred feet an' stop an' guide 'em jes' like on track or sumpin'. Lawdy, Lawd, sing songs to suit moment of work, maybe religious songs, maybe all mixed up with funny songs.

Oh, watch that sun, see how she run,
Never let it ketch you with yo' work undone.
Oh, Pharaoh's daughter lookin' for roses,
Stumped her toe an' fell over Moses.

Wus powerful sight to see 'bout five gangs men rollin' trucks an' unloadin' on docks, all singin'. Sometimes would sing same song, sometimes different songs, tryin' to outsing one 'nother. Would sing old songs an' mix 'em up. Leader in one gang would sing out:

Little David, play on yo' harp,

whilst crowd would join in:

Yes, hallelujah, Little David, play on yo' harp.

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'Nother leader further up way would sing out:

Who's been here since I been gone?

an' nex' leader sing back:

Big black soldier with derby on.

Then all gang join in big chorus, powerful harmonizing, Lawd, Lawd:

Little David, play on yo' harp, Hallelu,
Hallelu, little David, play on yo' harp,
Never seen like since I been born,
Soldiers keep a-comin', ships done gone,
Little David, play on yo' harp, hallelu.
Hallelu, little David, play on yo' harp.

When boys had to lift heavy boxes an' sacks an' bags an' every other kind heavy load anybody ever thought 'bout, would fix 'em up good old songs to suit occasion. Would heave-hora an' lift 'em up, and swing an' clang an' lay 'em down.

I'll be shoutin', uh-huh,
When I lay my burden down, uh-huh;
I'm gonna lay my burden down, uh-huh,
Settin' in the kingdom, uh-huh,

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I don't want you, uh-huh,
Lawd, to grieve after me, uh-huh,
When I'm dead an' burried, uh-huh,
In my grave, uh-huh,
I'm gonna lay my burden down.

French people never heard such singin', thought Negro soldiers and stevedoras mus' be mighty army of the Lord. Likewise heap of northern army men never heard colored folks sing an' thought mus' be wonderful boys. Also white captains and officers, both southern an' northern, told boys singin' was good for soldiers. Heard boys tellin' 'bout big General Foches praisin' colored soldiers for singin', signifyin' they helped feelin's of both colored an' white folks in war.

'Nother kind of song wus more quieter kind. Maybe boys would have to be heavin' gangways out an' in. Took powerful pull to do it. So boys would get ready for long pull, very long hard pull, everybody got to pull together hard after gettin' ready. So would say:

I—ask—my—girl—to—bring—me—a—
Ring-tail—gator—when—she—come—off—the— island.
Hea-v-ea-h-o-r-a h-e-i a h-e-a-ev 'e-m i-n boys.

Wa'n't no new song but first one boys thought 'bout.
Got it from Sentilla Island near Savannah an'
Buford. Wus that way in war. Boys jes' sing what-
ever would think of from old songs an' make 'em
fit in with war. Could do what they had to do.
Same train, same ship, same religion carried fathers
an' mothers carried soldiers too. Could do any-
thing had to do, could sing any song ever heard.

Oh, Jack, the rabbit, hey;
Oh, got a habit, hey;
Goin' in garden, hey;
Oh, cuttin' cabbage, hey;
Oh, Captain Cromo, hey;
Goin' North, hey;
Oh, pay skimmers off, hey.

Well, boys unloaded all sorts an' kinds of things
from ships. Sometimes would unload ammunition.
Officers would search every man an' take off all
matches an' cigarettes. Would load ammunition on
cushion trucks an' roll 'em like must be child of
God. Boys wondered whut would happen if am-
munition exploded. Talk about it. Later on seen
some ammunition dumps blowin' up an' knowed
whut wus like.

Had hard time unloadin' locomotives an' railroad

WINGS ON MY FEET

cars from ships. Maybe took 'bout ninety men to unload big locomotive. Would unload 'em from side hatch, pullin' 'em out by winches an' derricks set up on hill. Then would have track an' trucks to pull 'em up with big winches from hillside. Boys would strain an' sweat like Georgia mules. Got to singin':

Who's winnin' this war, Lord,
Who's gonna git Kaiser Bill.

'Bout that time we left off helpin' stevedoras an' stayed out near barracks, unloadin' steel rails an' cross-ties an' buildin' railroad for main-line supply fo' army. Never did see stevedoras no mo'. Wus mighty big crowd, stayin' in own barracks near town. Heard boys tellin' heap o' tales 'bout 'em, funny as hell. Howsomever, boys didn't have hard time up front like we did. Left 'em singin' an' growlin', mutterin' an' singin':

Roll, Jurden, roll, roll, Jurden, roll,
Black soldier, you'll be called on,
To shake that thing you're settin' on.

So we started buildin' railroad an' stayed in that place 'bout five weeks. Hardest work wus un-

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loadin' steel rails, maybe from gun dozier box cars.
Would take eight men to unload rail an' maybe ten
cars bein' unloaded same time. Fo' men on each
end of rail with one leader singin' out:

Grab 'em doggies, grab 'em;
Set 'em close by, boys;
Set 'em on heads now.

One big boy named Crowfoot Jim got both legs
broke. Wus up in car an' let rail fall on legs. Had
hard time. Howsomever, some boys said wish it
had been them so could go to hospital an' maybe git
sent back home. Never did see Crowfoot no mo',
neither did we know whether he got well.

So we kept on unloadin' rails an' cross-ties an'
buildin' railroad. Glad don't have no mo' rails.
Cross-ties heap easier to do, mo' like bein' back
home workin' on Big Ben. Three men can handle
cross-ties easy if knows how. Jes' swing 'em up an'
let 'em down.

Hosh—'e-m—high—boys,
Hosh—'em—high—ho,
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.

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Mos' outdashiones' job we had, howsomever, wus buildin' stretch of railroad, usin' them dam' little French fo' wheelers. Wished to God had hard-tail mules with sho'-'nuf wheelers. Got to thinkin' 'bout buildin' roads back in United States. Big crowd workin', maybe as high as thirty or forty wheelers all steppin' in line, maybe six loaders an' three hooks. All day long boys drivin' an' hollerin':

Knock 'em an' chop 'em,
Side wheel 'em an' lock 'em,
An' don't never stop.

So we got homesick blues again. Feels hell a-risin' an' had hard time keepin' us in camp. Got ruffish blues, too dam' mean to cry, raisin' hell in general. Go out try to buy French wines, dam' vin blank, red gin, rum, French beer, jes' anything we could git, if would git alcohol behind eyes.

Talk about yo' whisky,
Talk about yo' wine,
Ruther have my regular dram,
Than be in my right mind.

Boys quarrelin' an' fightin'. Never seen like. Jes' would play dozen. One boy told 'nother fellow his

old mommer jas' lak ferry boat an' 'bout that time cut his head clean off. Officers took every knife anybody had off'n 'em. Jes' had to do it. Boys rough fighters makin' up all sorts an' kinds of songs.

Wings on my feet, razor in my hand,
Gonna leave this goddam foreign land,
If I feels to-morrow like I feel to-day,
Good Lord, gonna drop my kit an' run away.

So preacher would try to have preachin' 'bout three times week. Thought he would see could he help officers keep us from playin' Old Man Bad. Some boys would go an' some fellows would sing an' holler with preacher. Howsomever, most boys didn't pay 'em no mind an' had heap fun off preacher an' songsters. Maybe would sing.

Preacher in pulpit got Bible in his hand,
Preachin' fer dollar to git another dram.
Preacher in pulpit laid his Bible down,
Women in corner shoutin' Alabama bound.

So 'bout that times moves us on over nearer front battle sector. Went part way on train, part way on long muddy marches. Boys started off feelin' better, always glad to be movin' on. Anything better'n whut they got now. Gonna see some mo' country,

WINGS ON MY FEET

gonna be travelin' men, maybe gonna git Kaiser if
he's over there. Maybe soldiers in army of Lord,
maybe dam' army roustabouts, singin':

Hail, hail, the gang's all here,
We're gonna git the Kaiser now.
Gonna hitch mules to Hindenburg line.

So told boys gonna leave the fo' wheelers an' rail-
road, gonna be engineerin' battalion maybe fightin'
unit, too. Lord, goin' up where we ain't never been
befo', gonna leave hard work in hands o' God.

Well, Lawdy, Lawd, when captain holler gas,
I don't want to be bothered with no jackass,
I want to be free, Lawd, I want to be free.

Told us we wus so young an' green an' so dam'
mean gonna send us up jes' between French an'
American lines. Startin' us off behin' lines, diggin'
trenches, fixin' wires, buildin' bridges, an' Lord
knows whut else we gonna have to do. Found it out,
Lawd, found it out befo' long. Boys gonna git theirs.
Howsomever, don't keer now, feelin' good an' start
off rarin' an' singin'.

General Fosh is fine old French
Gonna put all niggers in front-line trench;

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Barb-wire down, barrage begun,
Boche see niggers, Boche begins to run.
Well, hitch up my mules, mules work fine,
Hitched 'em up to Hindenburg line,
Drew clean back till snagged the Rhine,
Captain come 'long an' gimme my time.

XIII. Never Seen Like Since I Been Born

XIII

NEVER SEEN LIKE SINCE I BEEN BORN

So STARTED us off on long journey 'way across to
where French army wus fightin' back German
drive. Loaded us in French box cars. Look like big
black army, neither wus we like African soldiers
heard my mama's papa tell 'bout, neither wus we
ridin' like we rode to Camp Mode in United States.
Here we wus packed in French cars ridin' like big
army gonna bust war wide open. Neither wus we
black, neither white, jes' soldiers of the world.

We're on our way to Hel-i-go-land,
To get the Kaiser's goat,
I'm a son of a gun, if I see a Hun,
I'll make him understand
We'll knock the Hel-i-go,
Into Hel-i-go, out of Hel-i-go-land, yip.

Wus powerful hard trip, neither ridin' cushions
neither ridin' rods. Boys would git all over one
'nuther, quarrel an' fight and joree. Would sleep
lyin' down, standin' up, squattin' round, settin' up,
leanin' 'gainst wall, leanin' on other boys, sleepin'

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on backs, on sides, on bellies, Lawdy, Lawd, mouths open, eyes shet, sleepin' like men that wus dead. Feets ache, legs hurt, tired an' hongry, never seen no country like wus passin' through. Eve'ytime train stop boys go scramblin' out think they done got somewhere. Nothin' to it, officers drive 'em back. Crowd would try to be cheerful an' funny.

Where do we go from here, boys,
Where do we go from here?

Sho' is fact, one boy got lost on trip. Never did know whut became of him till somebody told us 'bout him after war was over. Told us 'bout company findin' him wanderin' 'bout in No Man's Land. Way it wus, this boy got off train an' got left when train started. So he don't know nothin' to do but git on nex' train. So he done that an' rode an' rode. Finds hisself clean up near Switzerland or somewhere else. So he gits on train an' rides back. Then rides some mo'. Says dam if he didn't ride from Bellyfont to deep wide ocean. Can't get nowhere, ain't got nothin' to eat, so gits off an' goes wanderin' round. Fool wus walkin' round up near front trenches. Sho' wus happy when white soldiers picked him up an' took him to camp. Made him sweep an' shine shoes an' do everything anybody ever do. Wus onli-

est colored soldier in camp. But boy sho' wus happy, thought he had come back home.

Thought white soldier told 'bout findin' this boy standin' out in field leanin' up 'gainst barb-wire fence, lookin' like Satan done got him. So soldier asks him where the hell he's been an' whut he's doin' an' where he wus born. Colored soldier says he wus born in Mississippi. So white soldier slaps him on back an' tells him he gonna kill him or knock hell out o' him, either he's gonna hug his neck. So colored soldier grins an' says to white soldier if he's from Mississippi, sho' God first *white* man he's seen since he been in France. Told me they come from same part of Mississippi. Lawdy, Lawd, that colored soldier sho' glad to see Mississippi white man one time. Maybe last time, I don't know.

'Nother boy got lost from line after we wus marchin' on long hike. Slipped out of line to git drink. When come back company had done turned corner an' started down 'nother street. So he starts runnin' to ketch up. 'Bout that time 'nother company comes up, sees him runnin', 'rests him an' won't nobody believe what he tells 'em. So takes him to guard-house.

WINGS ON MY FEET

French towns an' country looked funny to boys. Never seen no states an' towns like that. French folks look funny. Some boys skeered of 'em like Mexicans or somebody. Some boys git tickled listening at 'em tryin' to talk. Boys would have fun talkin' 'bout 'em, gonna tell folks when they gits back home. Thought houses look different, stucco an' rock an' brick, with all sorts an' kinds o' flowers an' fruits.

"Hey, boy, look a yonder. Hee—ho-ho, got them hens settin' up in shelves like bookcase or sumpin'.

"Well, Lord, I wonder what you gonna do,
When chickens roost too high for you?"

"Yeh, nigger. But hot dawg, thank my Lord, I ain't got to haul that manuore pile an' scatter it in red gullies down in Georgia.

"Well, oh, Lord, if I had mule an' mule wouldn't gee,
I'd hit him in head with a singletree."

"Hot zipity, look at that dog pullin' cart. Hot zipity, bet he wouldn't know whut coon or rabbit wus, much less'n ketchin' one. Look like little boy's plaything, never seen nothin' like that befo'."

"Yeh, boy, look at them Frogs plowin' steers, jes'

look at 'em. Got 'em hitched by horns, ain't got no yoke or nothin'. Don't know how to do nothin'. Lemme git out an' show 'em how to gee-haw."

"Sho' got rich land. Could grow cotton, maybe make two bales to acre. Sholy would make fine corn. Good Lord, ain't got none on it. Frogs don't know how to grow no crops neither nothin' but funny things. Onliest crops I seen is grapes an' sich things. Don't know how to farm like we does."

"Well, brother, one thing they knows how to do. I seen mos' outdasionest funeral I ever seed. Least-wise some of it wus. 'Scusin' had po' old hoss pull-in' hearse an' rickity buggies, sholy did have some style. Way it wus, would have handsome black robe 'cross hearse. Would be three bearers on one side an' three on other side, walkin' 'long side by side holdin' robe, preacher walkin' in front readin' an' chantin'. Lawdy, how come we can't try that out in lodge when we gits back?"

When we comes on nearer battle-fields seen a heap of France never seen nothin' like befo'. Homes busted up look like old barns in moonlight full o' ghosts. Fields look like devil hisself stepped on 'em. Barb-wire look like old man Simpson's paster fence, only mo' so. Lawdy how old mules would cut them-

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selves runnin' Sunday mornin'. Bridges an' fences all broke up, look like regular devil's land, graveyard, ain't nobody never gonna live here no mo'.

One of funniest things ever happen on this trip wus when two white sargents got to fightin'. Both 'bout half full o' likker or sumpin'. Started quarrelin' an' jes' kept gittin' worse an' worse. Boys made room for 'em. Would stand round an' watch 'em. Colored soldiers didn't say much, jes' watch 'em and laugh at 'em. Fightin' like two banter roosters. When got through neitherest one had shirt on. Boys said they finish fight after got to camp, howsomever I never seen 'em an' can't say.

So finally train comes to stop an' unloaded boys. Thought they would let us rest one night. Stayed in barns an' houses an' places where big guns been bustin' up town. Wus gittin' cold an' never seen so much rain an' mud since I been born. Rainin' an' pourin'. Wus rain whut wet you I'm talkin' 'bout. Howsomever, boys gonna seen heap mo' rain than this. So they starts out nex' day marchin' an' singin' some mo'.

God told Noah 'bout rainbow sign—Lawd, didn't it rain? No mo' water but fire nex' time—Lawd, didn't it rain? Well, it rain fohty days an' nights without stoppin', Sinners got mad 'cause rain kept a-droppin'.

NEVER SEEN LIKE

Well, sinner didn't have nothin' on me, neither Noah. Maybe I got rainbow round my shoulder an' wings on my feet. What I needs is boats on my feet to git out of this. Howsomever, workin' in rain ain't nothin' new to me. Been doin' it all my days. Me an' war is buddies, sloppin' an' sloshin' in rain is my middle name.

Oh, Lord, captain, didn't you say
Wouldn't march me in rain an' hail all day?
I want to go home, Lord, I want to go home.

Feets got to hurtin' an' achin'. Some po' boys feet frost-bitten till hurt to look at 'em. Boys say jes' got to stop, can't stand it. Hollerin', "Lawd, Lawd, can't go no mo'. Oh, Lord Jesus, help po' boy." So they lets us stop an' rest, seem like 'bout minute. So hollers for us to fall in an' march like hell. So I says to officer, that I feels too bad, can't put on my shoes. So he says, hell, he ain't got nothin' to do with that, to come on barefooted if I wants to. Lawd, Lawd, feel my hell a-risin', got railroad blues, ain't got no fare.

Rocks on mountain, fish in sea,
Slacker got my baby, army got me,
Lord, I want to go home.

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'Bout that time was gettin' up nearer front. Could hear big guns an' at night see flashin' lights. Got them creepin'-feelin' blues. Seen big holes where shells been bustin'. Boys gittin' fidgety, some skeered, some silent, some groanin', look like don't know whut to do. Ain't singin' no songs, neither spirituals, neither funny songs, neither war songs. Still they can do what they have to do an' so goes marchin' on. Sometimes would have to march out on side of road to let trucks or ambulance or guns an' cassions go rumblin' by.

Wus one big boy maybe half sleep or big fool or sumpin' an' wouldn't git out of way when ambulance come clangin' by. Driver seen boy on one side of road an' big shell-hole on other. Had to run over boy else run in big hole an' break up ambulance an' maybe kill wounded. So decided to hit big boy trompin' along. Hit him an' looked like throwed him 'bout three ways an' Sunday. So boy begins hollerin', "Oh, Lordy, I'm killed, I'm dyin'." Doctors come rushin' back, strip off clothes, can't find nothin' wrong with him. So tells him ain't dam' thing wrong with him.

Sho' wus funny sight, soldiers all marchin' by. This big black boy is standin' there naked like big black

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statue or sumpin', grinnin' an' says, "Thank you, sir, Captain," makes finish salute and starts puttin' his clothes back on. Actual fact, boy went on marchin', never hurt him.

So boys goes on marchin' an' sloshin' in rain an' mud, wet an' tired an' hungry. Still I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. Done it befo'. I can do what I have to do. Didn't know it, but wus gonna go 'leven days without changin' clothes an' thirty hours in water up to ankles. Howsomever, nothin' to do 'bout it. Got to do it.

Looks down that road jes' far as I could see,
Band playin' "Nearer My God to Thee."
Never seen like since I been born.

Finally we stops an' goes into camp. Don't know whut we gonna do. Maybe French can't do much with us, maybe we can't do much with French. Howsomever, here we is and here we gonna stay. Got to go an' come. Got to keep up order. Drill some an' work some. Teachin' me to drill, didn't need it. Teachin' me to dodge, good Lord, been dodgin' all my life.

Hounds on my track
Never did look back,
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

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Gittin' ready to do sumpin', boys, don't know whut it is. Boys settin' round in front of pup tent watchin' Fritzie boys flyin' 'way over in distance. Sometimes sees 'em comin' over. One time tent blowed down, boys thought Germans had 'em. Runnin' this way an' that. Took 'bout half-hour to get 'em back. One time seen one shoot up big observation balloon, *puff, puff*. Lawdy, Lawd, seen man flyin' down in parchute, look like angel or sumpin'. Boys always goin' on foolishments an' singin', so I hol-lers out:

Look over yonder whut I see,
Big white angel comin' after me.
Dry bones gonna rise again.

Howsomever, boys don't laugh much. Sorter silent an' gloomy-lookin', an' maybe skeered. One of boys gets off old joke 'bout if he gits killed by airplane sho' gonna be 'cause it fall on him. 'Nother boy tells old story 'bout first time old colored fellow ever seen flyin' machine wus when one landed in field where he wus pickin' cotton. Said old gray-haired colored gentleman wus tremblin' an' say, "Good mornin', Marse Jesus, how's yo' pa?" So I says I got wings on my feet, don't need no flyin' ship myself. Anyhow, angel wings kind a wings I wants. An' don't want no angel wings in this time.

Howsomever, boys tired an' grouchy. Look like fightin' over anything an' ever'thing. Fight over jes' *anything*. Maybe be arguin' 'bout railroads. Git to talkin' 'bout French trains ain't so good as American. Then git to arguin' which railroad is best or longest one or biggest. Is it Rock Island, or Southern Pacific, or Atlantic or Seaboard Air Line, maybe good old Southern? Where do they run to? Where do they come from? How many cars has they got? What's longest train? Arguin' an' talkin' contrary.

Well, longest train I ever saw
Was on that old seaboard line;
The engine passed at half pas' one,
An' caboose went by at nine.

"Well, old strumpet, that ain't no train at all. Longest train I ever seen wus passenger train. Started with Pharaoh's army an' never stop till she run into promised land. I wus the engineer.

"All I want wus water an' coal,
Poke my head out, see wheelers roll."

"Dam' lie, you ain't never seen no promise land, neither is you gonna see it, 'cause I'm gonna kill you. Man I kills ain't gonna slip an' slide them golden streets. Gonna bust hell wide open."

"Well, old bastard, man kill me won't have no luck. If he be livin' in mornin' be sumpin' God intended."

Or maybe boys gits to arguin' 'bout who's richest man, wonderin' how much does it cost to build airplane or make cannon or sumpin'. One boy say Mr. Carnegie, whilst 'nother say Mr. John D. Rockefeller, oil king. 'Nother boy say don't know whut they's talkin' 'bout Mr. Fairchild richest man. So two boys gits to fightin'. One long tall boy, Jack Hall from Alabama, an' one short stubby boy, Joe Robinson from Mississippi.

So officer comes along an' gits gloves, signifyin' boys can go to fightin'. "Now, boys," he says, "when you gits enough let me know an' I'll stop it."

Boys fightin' for one spread hour. Never could lick one 'nother. Actual fact, all bruised an' bleedin' but couldn't beat. Started out hittin' in face an' stomach. Could duck like rabbits. Never did git discouraged smearin' faces an' never stop till somebody gonna stop 'em. Crowd havin' good time.

"Well, I think Jack Hall gonna win. Go to it, Black Boy."

"Well, I think Joe gonna win. Spur him like rooster, Joe. Stick him up."

So boys throwed sand in faces an' got 'em sho'-'nuf mad. One boy fell down, crowd hollerin' an' laughin'. But never did beat. Crowd say, "Well, boys, wait till Jack an' Joe git holt of Kaiser's army. Ain't gonna be nothin' left to it, Lawdy, Lawd."

We wus always gittin' in trouble. One day boy stole one of my buckets. I told him it wus mine. He says I'm dam' lie. So I pulls my gun, wus gonna kill him sho' as hell. I gits my bucket all right.

'Nother time boy an' me wus buddies an' I loaned him little French pistol thought a heap of. When I come back he didn't want to give it back to me. So we wrestled an' I took gun 'way from him. Boy got mad an' come runnin' round corner with rifle cocked, callin' me so many dad-blamed things can't take 'em. Wus gonna shoot me. So I rolls off in dugout hollerin' to sargent not to let him shoot at me, 'cause if he does I'm gonna kill him sho'.

Sometimes boys jes' act like fools or Old Man Bad or devil hisself. Seen two boys shootin' at one 'nuther with sniper's rifle jes' to see could they hit 'selves. Done gone funny and crazy.

One time when boys wus in French town one day,

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white soldier come up to colored fellow and ask colored boy to do sumpin' for him. Colored fellow wouldn't do it. White fellow stuck him in rump with bayonet. Colored fellow cut his head clean off.

I myself would git in little trouble with white sargents sometimes. One night 'bout eight o'clock thought I was sick an' told sargent in charge of food supply I wanted cook to make me some soup. I wus jes' hongry an' feelin' sick. Told him I had to have some. Sargent said, all right, all right. Still he don't pay me no 'tention, so I asks him again. Sargent hits me over head with big spoon or sumpin'. Then I jes' knocks him down. 'Bout that time they ketches me an' holds me whilst sargent gives me beatin'.

Had some ruffish times out in towns. Would go to big party or to drinkin' place or somewhere. Whole crowd git to drinkin' an' goin' on. Sometimes white soldiers start ruckus an' try to run black soldiers off. Had some turrible times. Already told about some.

One night heard white soldier tell little French girl to come up an' tell me, "Hello, nigger, what makes niggers so many colors?" So she did, an' I makes

out like I'm very polite an' I'm some high-stepper. So I tells her blackes' ones come from down in Florida an' Mississippi, high yallers from Georgia an' South Carolina, high browns from North Carolina an' Virginia, an' blue veins from up North where weather is cooler. Told 'bout heap boys passin' for white an' signified that all boys would be white did they live in France long. Lady laughed at my funny talk, wus good joke on white boy.

Told you 'bout Shorty Geech. Thought he played joke other way on white officer. Boys jes' would go out, jes' had to have good time. Blow up if stayed in, raise hell if they goes out. Jes' naturally full o' foolishment, can't help it, jes' 'bout go crazy. Don't keer, maybe gonna die to-morrow. So Shorty goes up to white officer an' makes finish salute. Officer asks him whut he wants an' so he says he can't speak no French won't white officer please speak to French girl for him. Lawdy, Lawdy, Lawd.

Boys always runnin' off A. W. O. L. Won't let 'em out, go anyway. Slip out at night, police all 'long road. But we gits by 'em an' gits 'way. Sometimes would git after us 'cause we be slippin' long an' some fool jes' *have* to talk. Then you see some runnin', goin' everywhere through woods an' fields.

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Like old times runnin' from Law after gamblin' game. Lawd, Lawd, when I leave there jumpin', somethin' done gone wrong.

Way up on the mountain, haulin' off my corn,
Raccoon sot the dogs on me, possum blowed his horn,
Whoa, gal, Cairo, whoa, gal, Cairo,
Whoa, gal, Cairo, I don't want no mo'.

Way up on mountain, haulin' off my corn,
Up jumped big black snake with ashcake under his arm,
Well, it's whoa, gal, Cairo, whoa, gal, Cairo,
An' it's whoa, gal, Cairo, I don't want no mo'.

Couldn't keep me in. I was sort of magic boy, could always git out. Maybe would have two men guard-in'. Couldn't keep me in. Would stick bayonets in do' at me an' do every sort an' kind of thing. Howsomever, nex' thing they know I would come walk-in' in comin' back from havin' good time out. Never knowed how I got out. Me an' war sho' wus buddies. A. W. O. L. my middle name.

I jes' *would* git in trouble. One time I got out an' stayed A. W. O. L. 'bout three days, leastwise mo'n two. M. P.'s started to 'rest me. So I had stole French ottermatic an' started shootin'. Good Lord, wus funny to see polices run. Shot hole in hat of

NEVER SEEN LIKE

one M. P. But they come back an' got me. Jes' natchelly give me hell. Didn't know whut they wus gonna do with me, but finally decided to send me out nex' mornin' on ammunition truck. Needed men mighty bad. Times gettin' hot, Germans comin' on.

Well, never seen like since I been born,
Jerries keep a-comin', shells done gone.
Lordy, let yo' light shine on me.

So that night we wus sleepin' in pup tent an' Fritzzy boys flyin' over us. Droppin' shells an' raisin' hell. So shell drop jes' prezactly between me an' 'nother boy. Actual fact would 'a' killed eitherest one or both of us if we been movin' jes' few inches. Lawdy, Lawdy, ought 'a' seen boys runnin' for dugouts. One colored sargent outrun all others an' so made him buck private. Howsomever, didn't have me worryin'. Ain't no disgrace to run whenever you is skeered. Shells whizzin' over us, singin' an' sighin' an' moanin' an' whizzin' which we never heard nothin' like befo'.

Hush, somebody's callin' my name,
Oh, my God, what shall I do?
Well, it's hush, somebody's callin' my name,
Oh, my Lord, what shall I do?

XIV. Sun Don't Set in the Morning

XIV

SUN DON'T SET IN THE MORNING

So NEXT mornin' put me on ammunition truck an' started us up to front trenches. Big drive wus on, big guns roarin' in distance an' Fritzies flyin' all over God's heaven. Shells bustin' in road an' truck go carreerin' round 'em like goddam. Thought I wus gonna tell folks 'bout it when I gits back home. Must 'a' been 'bout six trucks takin' ammunition up to front dump. So we tells boys good-by, till we meet again, 'cause somebody in this crowd ain't comin' back. So I says if wust comes to wust gonna pull my gas-mask down over my face an' holler, "Good mornin', Lord Jesus."

Sun don't set in the mornin',
Oh, Lord, sun don't set in the mornin'.
Lordy, let yo' light shine on me.

Ammunition trucks wus rattlin' on, zigging an' zaggin'. Wus little lull in German firin'. So wus crowd of soldiers under big tree so Jerries couldn't spot 'em. Ammunition trucks come rattlin' 'long. Boys heard plane sneakin' over quiet like. Wonderin'

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could it be Heine. So decided it was American accompanyin' ammunition trucks. All of sudden big black Boche plane swooped down low, sweepin' road an' droppin' bombs on ammunition trucks.

Never seen such runnin' since I been born, of which I was one. Oh, Lordy, tryin' to git away from them trucks. Runnin' every which-a-way, north, east, south, west, hollerin' an' dodgin' an' fallin'. Sholy did burn the wind, oh, Lord, tryin' to git away. Well, good Lord, 'specs I showed my heels so fast look precisely like I'm crawlin'.

Well, my home ain't here,
But it's further down the road.
Lordy, let yo' light shine on me.

'Bout thirty-eight boys was killed and never did find some fellows neither know where they was covered up. Buddies hollerin' an' cryin', "Oh, my Lord, I'm killed," "I'm hit," "Where is Sam?" "Where is John?" "Oh, my God is you kilt?" Some po' buddies never did holler no mo'. Done gone to see their Jesus. Oh, my Lord, death is in this land.

Oh, the rocks an' the mountain will all flee away,
An' you shall have a new hiding-place that day.

Thought me an' war must be buddies, leastwise why ain't no shell neither bullet got my name on it. Me an' war same thing 'scusin' why didn't shell git me like did my buddies. Oh, Lord, still ain't no harm in runnin' when time comes. All men an' officers fallin' flat an' dodgin' whizzin', zoonin' shells an' ain't they been teachin' me how to dodge? I can do what I have to do an' I can run. If I gits in place where I can't run and need me to fight, I can fight. Or if I gits mad, seein' blood an' smellin' guns an' dead bodies I can fight an' don't know what else I'm doin'.

One day squads wus up diggin' trenches an' layin' wires. Germans keep on droppin' shells. *Boom, boom, whirr, wheeze, blam*, shell would fall 'bout hundred yards off. Boys startin' an' runnin'. Officer hollers to us to come on back. 'Nother shell busts little nearer. All boys droppin' tools an' startin' an' fallin'. So officer says to us, damit, we knows he's skeered as anybody; we knows he's gonna run if comes time to run; an' next black boy starts runnin' gonna git shot in pants sho' as hell. So I says, "That's all right, Captain, I knows that; but you don't mind, does you, if when you starts runnin', I passes you, does you?"

Boys always boastin'. One day boy wus on guard

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duty. German airplane comes over lookin' for men. Drops shell. Skeered men so bad went runnin' an' divin' into dugouts like skeered rabbits. Sholy got rumps tore up bad. One big boy could he plunge in football like that would make all-world full-back. Howsomever, he wus biggest boaster.

Other boys, hollerin', "Oh, Lord, all my sins whip-pin' me now. Oh, Lord, hope to git home jes' one mo' time. If you jes' let me git back this time, be willin' to die. Oh, Lord, have mercy."

So this big boy hollers, "Aw, shet up, you big beef. Look at me. I ain't skeered." 'Bout that time shell drops and this fellow busts over 'bout ten men tryin' to git under 'em. Busts seat of pants wide open, neither is it shell what busts 'em, neither is it air.

Wus 'nother big fellow in one squad wus big boaster. Always talkin' 'bout how he ain't skeered o' nothing. Said he could eat Germans for breakfast. Could step over dead bodies like steps down in French cellar lookin' for cognac. Said machine-guns wa'n't no mo' to him than squirrel barkin' or sumpin'. Told boys this little shootin' wa'n't nothin', he'd seen mo' men killed at corn-shuckin'. So I tells him he's dam' coward an' bets him new suit

SUN DON'T SET IN THE MORNING

clothes 'gainst fo' bits he's gonna run first time shell busts.

'Bout that time Germans start barrage. Shells start droppin' an' bustin'. One po' boy is killed, an' sho' 'nuf I looks round an' sees that fellow 'way cross field divin' behin' tree jes' like boy slidin' for home base. 'Bout that time Heines throwin' gas barrage an' po' fellow done lost gas-mask an' goes hollerin' an' screamin'. Never did collect my fo' bits. War got that buddy, never got me.

I got rainbow tied all round my shoulder,
Wings hitched to my feet,
Oh, my God, sun don't set in the mornin'.

Heap o' things happenin'. Can't name 'em. Take me till to-morrow night to tell about 'em. Already told 'bout some. We wus in line of march where we seen soldiers comin' an' goin', wounded an' prisoners, white an' colored goin' up to the front an' comin' back. Seen all sorts an' kinds o' things. Some pitiful an' some funny as hell I know.

Heard 'bout corporal with bunch o' men got out on lef' side o' where they ought 'a' been. Shots pourin' in on 'em an' corporal runs off an' left his men. Men hollerin', "Oh, Corporal, please get somebody

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turn on water works. Germans done got us all. We's all daid, oh, Lawdy." Come to find out fools wus cross-firin' at one 'nother.

Heard 'bout colored soldiers makin' great fight over next to French. Germans thought would skeer 'em. Didn't do it. Said colored soldiers little nervous at first, takin' heap o' pride in guns an' shootin' at everything could git excuse to shoot at. But got down to fightin' like regular bear-cats. Heard 'bout two colored boys out on parole got snared by German patrol, killed fo' an' captured 'bout dozen. Boys could do what they have to do. Jes' thinkin' 'bout whut's gonna happen whut kills boys.

Told 'bout boys gittin' in front line. First few boys killed got 'em skeered, then got 'em mad. Seein' red an' blood an' smellin' war, boys jes' nachelly gonna fight. Knowed they got to die sometime anyhow. Had faces set, big veins poppin' out of foreheads. Git shot, don't know it. Git cut, can't feel it. Been shot an' cut up befo'. Would cuss an' holler an' swear, gonna fight like black magic. Maybe fight like Algerian devils with crooked knives in mouths. Boys would sing 'bout it takin' long, tall, slim black man to make a German lay his rifle down.

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Well, Jerry, I got my butcher-knife an' gatlin' gun,
Ain't no use for you to try to run,
I'm gonna kill you, dig you up jus' for fun,
Let buzzards pick meat off yo' bones, bum, bum.

Wus one colored sargent, regular army fellow, too mean to live. Too turrible to talk about. Got boys mad to make 'em fight. Would say to boys, "I'm here to-day. World's in trouble. I don't keer if sun never shine. I don't give dam about my mother, neither God. To hell with God an' devil. I looks toward the risin' sun an' tell Lord to go to devil." Lordy, boys say any man would cuss his mama an' God won't have no luck. Boys skeered to fight, skeered not to fight. Howsomever, they can do what they have to do.

Well, heard mighty rumblin' up in the sky,
Sho' God can't be my Lord a-passin' by.
Death is in this land.

Already told 'bout some things. Can't name 'em all. Take me till to-morrow night to tell about 'em. Heard 'bout boys gittin' lost in No Man's Land. Heard 'bout two hundred soldiers marchin' one night, been under fire, goin' back to front. Wus skittish. So one boy hits foot 'gainst rock an' falls down. All other boys thinks he's dodgin' shell. Ac-

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tual fact, every man in line fell down, jes' like row of dominoes settin' up. If knock one over, it falls on next one, an' whole line falls down. Boys sholy feelin' skittish, comin' back an' goin' up, don't make no difference which. Maybe mutterin' an' growlin', maybe singin' little bit.

Well, I knows there's trouble up yonder ahead,
But it don't matter much if I lay my head.
When whole German army firin' over my head
I knows I'm lyin' on death-bed.

Boys had troublesome an' sorrowful times. Nothin' to do about it. Sometimes so thirsty would drink water mixed with blood from horse track. Would drink blood an' eat raw meat. Didn't know what we wus doin', didn't keer.

Sleep in rain an' mud up to ankles. Go weeks without takin' off clothes. Still we had to sleep. Sleepin' in barns, stables, stalls, hay-lofts, cellars, out-houses, stores, old homes, ditches, dugouts, an' every other kind o' place. Standin' an' walkin' an' lyin' down and crossed up, sprawled out, piled up along road, sleepin' to keep from bein' skeered. Actual fact, wus worse than road hustlin' in North Carolina.

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Lord wished I wus in Georgia standin' on road side,
Waitin' for that ball an' chain,
Lord, ruther be on rock pile, hammer in my hand,
Than servin' captain in this No Man's Land.

Seen German prisoners. Boys wonder why wouldn't make 'em work hard like do colored soldiers. Talk 'bout colored worker bein' lazy, ought to seen them Fritzie boys. Thought I would have some fun with German boy one day. Way it wus, I could take safety-pin and stick through my neck or face or arm or anywhere and pin it back an' never hurt, neither would it bleed. Other boys tried it, couldn't do it. So thought I would skeer German boy. Got whole pack of pins an' stuck 'em over my face an' started toward boy, gonna pin myself to him an' stick him up. Boy thought I wus black devil or sumpin'.

Thought I told 'bout gamblin' boys which I wus gamblin' man myself. So boys gamblin' whilst war wus goin' on, one kid jes' gamble all time. Would be shells droppin' an' bustin'. This boy didn't keer. Would holler at shell, "Hey, don't be disturbin' my game." Could interest him with penny. Would git right down on knees an' let you break him. Howsomever, seen him one night so homesick, lices bitin' him till he crawls out of dugout an' rolls over

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on ground cryin' like baby, "Oh, Lord, please let me git back home to my wife. Oh, Lord, dam these French roaches an' busy cooties. Jes' let me git back home one mo' time." But he never did git back. Wus one of po' boys made us dig up after armistice.

Well, we's long gone from Georgia,
Long, long gone from Mississippi,
Long gone from North Carolina an' Alabam',
An' maybe we never git home again.
Well, we're long gone from where we come from.

Boys would write all sorts of letters home. Some would write letters 'selves an' some would git Red Cross or Y. M. C. A. to write for 'em. Officers would read 'em all an' raise Cain with boys for writin' crazy letters. One boy wrote home he wus in No Man's Land. Officer asks him if he knows No Man's Land is up between lines. 'Nother boy writes home to please send him stamped envelope with five-cent stamp on it, so he can mail his diary back home. Say got hot stuff in it. Thought if could put stamp on it Uncle Sam wouldn't censor it. Jes' didn't know much. Some boys always writin' home sayin' they is gettin' on fine.

One boy gits letter from wife tellin' him how proud

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she is to git money he sends home. She hopes he won't git killed but says she's got 'nuf insurance writ on him so she can fly high. So tells him he needn't worry 'bout her. Boys would git all sorts an' kinds of letters an' packages 'scusin' heap never would be delivered till after war. Some got buck-eyes an' charms an' all sorts an' kinds of funny things home-folks would send.

When General Pershing would come by or soldiers have message from General Foshes or maybe from President Wilson would talk 'bout big generals an' presidents like wus King Jesus or Jehovah.

Heard mighty rumblin' up in the sky
Must be Captain Wilson passin' by.
Lordy, let yo' light shine on me.

Some fellows arguin' 'bout Kaiser. Said must be devil. Thought his pictures look like sharp face an' ears stick up like horns. Thought he must be old Evil hisself. Must be magic and hoodoo. Thought General Pershing an' Foshes gonna put that graveyard dirt on German army. Germans sharp all right, but American side little bit swiftest. Big guns boom-ing, told boys wus gonna take 'em out on parole that night an' got to cut wires. So I says, well, then

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Kaiser better count his soldiers, 'cause I'm on my way an' can't turn back.

Howsomever, boys don't know what to do. Can't learn to fight gas. Skeered of it. Wonders if could get some magic to fight it with. Can't see it, mus' be works of devil. Got to git hoodoo or magic spell on it somehow. Boche tryin' to conjure American soldiers. So man got to have nerve if he live. Gonna die if he don't have nerve. Howsomever, I'm principled up like this. If war gonna git me, gonna git me. I got to luck it. 'Scusin' war never got me, never will.

Oh, Lord, sun don't set in the mornin',
Sun don't rise in evenin',
Lordy, let yo' light shine on me.

Turrible feelin' when we goes out at night. Hear guns boomin' an' see flashin' fire. Make me think 'bout big Christmas shootin', 'scusin' this ain't no celebration. This is hell breakin' loose with devil flyin' grenades an' guns. I already told 'bout mystery of battle-field, 'bout settin' of sun, big thunderstorm comin' up on one side, big guns roarin' on other. Dead bodies of horses an' men an' poison-gas smell like judgment day or sumpin', can't tell what it is. Smellin' blood, hearin' guns barkin',

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seein' flashes of cannons, then eve'ything dark and quiet. Outdashionest feelin' man ever had. Must be like jungles of Africa, got to fight, else got to die. Bullets slippin' up on you, gas comin' on, shells droppin', blowin' up earth. Steppin' in funk-holes like sinner man meetin' devil in hell. Old Satan got big guns shootin' maybe seventy-five miles. Can't nobody spy 'em out.

Good Lord, can't be satisfied. Ain't nothin' but me an' war an' world. Ain't no white man, ain't no colored man, ain't no Germans, jes' me an' war, an' my feelin's. Me an' war same thing. All come under same gourd vine to me. Still I feels like a motherless child, Lord, feel like train ain't got no drivin' wheel. Lord, distant music like tom toms in Africa stirrin' fightin' blood. White man ask me would I shoot Germans if they be white folks. Well, I don't know, Lord, I don't know. Say they is white but I'm gonna forgit that when I gits started. 'Scusin' maybe neither will I forgit it.

Gonna take my shirt an' swab out my gun
Gonna shoot big hole in dam' old Hun
Lord, the blood done sign my name.
Death is in this land.

So 'bout that time big shell strikes jes' few feet off.

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I'm fallin' to my face, Lord, I'm fallin' to my face. "Oh, Lord, I'm hit. Oh, Lord, done covered me up." Thought war got me this time. Howsomever, war never got me, never will, got my buddies, never got me.

So next thing I remember I wus in hospital. Shell covered me up. Cut big place on my head an' face, look like hurt me bad. But I'm gittin' well next week an' gittin' out of hospital in little mo'n month, jes' day befo' Armistice wus signed. I seen many boys badly wounded an' some dyin'. Wus pitiful sight. Told me 'bout one colored soldier saved life of white captain, carried him on shoulder 'cross battle-field. Colored soldier wounded. Thought white captain seen colored boy wus took good keer of an' after got to New York, got him best doctors could find. Saved boy's life maybe. Thought he was finest white man ever put pair britches on.

Doctors worked hard on wounded soldiers. Seen 'em bear down on legs or arms been broke, settin' 'em back, till boys would scream an' holler. Nothin' to do 'bout it. Mo' wounded than doctors can tend to. Jes' had to have nerve to live. One day seen colored fellow knock pipe out of doctor's mouth. Didn't mean to do it. Wus jes' hurtin' so till he throwed hand up, *blam, blam*. Couldn't help it.

SUN DON'T SET IN THE MORNING

Boys in ward where I wus all gittin' better. So would sing all sorts of funny war songs. Even got to rollin' bones, jes' would play bad. 'Scusin' some of boys would sing good old religious songs thinkin' 'bout folks back home an' wonderin' would they ever git home again.

Oh, Lord, I'm sick an' want to be healed,
Oh, Lord, I'm sick an' want to be healed,
Oh, Lord, I'm sick an' want to be healed.
Heal me, Jesus, along the heavenly way.

Oh, Lord, I'm crippled an' want to walk,
Oh, Lord, I'm crippled an' want to walk,
Oh, Lord, I'm crippled an' want to walk.
Heal me, Jesus, along the heavenly way.

XV. Ain't Nothin' But Me an' War an'
World.

XV

AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT ME AN' WAR AN' WORLD

I LEFT hospital day befo' we heard 'bout Armistice. So I goes back to my company. Next day wus rollin' up barbed-wire an' cleanin' up French fields. So squad of soldiers keep rollin' an' rollin' up wire from trenchments. One boy says to officer whut's this Armistice white folks talkin' 'bout. Officers tells him they's talkin' 'bout stoppin' war an' then everybody's goin' home. "Lawdy, Lawd," this fellow says, "take us three years befo' we can jes' roll up this wire, 'scusin' we don't do nothin' else."

We ain't gonna work no mo' that day, talk about it. Everybody knocks off, gonna celebrate. Eve'ybody talkin' an' goin' on like all-day church meetin' or circus come to town. Eve'ybody talkin' 'bout goin' home. Lord, talk about it. Ain't nothin' but me an' war an' world.

"Lawd, Lawd, done caught Kaiser now." "Done laid them Heines low." "Done bing-banged 'em on the Rhine." "Fritzie boys on the run, shot him in the pants." "Told Kaiser Bill better count his men

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when I got here." Some boys made friends in France, singing:

Ain't but the one thing grieve my mind
Goin' 'way, baby, an' leave you behind.
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

One boy in our company thought he would take little French girl back home with him. Seen her later down in Georgia. Did not marry boy, but joined Baptist church with him. Thought she was neither white neither colored. Had hard time but was mighty fine lady. Said boy's mama treated her mighty nice an' lady got good job workin' as maid for white folks.

Howsomever, boys don't have to worry 'bout leavin' nobody behind 'cause ain't goin' home for many po' weary day. Armistice was signed 'leventh day of November an' we didn't leave for home till ninth day of June. Talk about it. Take me till to-morrow night to tell 'bout all things happen. Can't name 'em. Maybe worse than war. Had to do every kind of work anybody ever heard of. Workin' in rock quarries, haulin' all day in rain, guardin' prisoners, both German an' colored. Tryin' to straighten up everything, tryin' to do French some good. Would send locomotives an' cars an' soldiers to help with

ME AN' WAR AN' WORLD

anything had to do, put engines together, fix railroads, help handle provisions. Fixin' up roads, rollin' up wire, buildin' bridges, cleanin' up towns, buildin' houses back, diggin' up dead bodies an' buryin' 'em again, pickin' up shells an' cleanin' up ammunition dumps. Never seen like since I been born.

Glory, glory, hallelujah,
When I lay my burden down;
I'm gonna be in heaven
When I lay my burden down.

Preacher in company I been tellin' 'bout made up some mo' songs, always singin' religious songs. Called one jubilee war song, 'bout twenty verses, maybe mo'. Heard 'em singin' it after got back to good old U. S. A. I disremembers most of song. Still I recollects some lines.

Lord, I'm over in a very strange land,
Where all the soldiers walk hand in hand.
Now I'm so glad, I'm so glad,
Jesus brought peace all over this land,
You know, I do declare, I'm so glad
Jesus brought peace all over this land.

One day soon after Armistice we wus assigned to task of diggin' up dead bodies. Wa'n't buried right,

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got to bury 'em again. Boys went on strike. Jes' wa'n't gonna be foolin' with no dead bodies, neither cemetery diggin'. Throwed picks and shovels down. Made pile 'bout big as house. Gonna git guns an' fight. Jes' ain't gonna dig up no dead bodies. No-body couldn't do nothin' with 'em.

Oh, Lord, got grave-diggin' feelin' in my heart,
I shivers and shakes in my soul, oh, Lord,
When I looks in that deep black hole,
Oh, Lord, dead bones gonna rise again.

So sends for Pop Grissley, fine white man could do most anything with colored soldiers. Thought he always treated us right. Told us 'bout him savin' life of colored soldier on battle-field. Finest white man ever put pair britches on. He wus principled up like this. A man wus a man no matter whut wus color of his skin. Jes' 'cause he happen to be black don't make no difference.

So he gits up on hill or big box or sumpin' an' tells boys he wants to talk with 'em little while. Will they listen to him? Soldiers answers, "Yes, Lord, hear him. Speak to us, Captain." So he tells men he knows they wants to go home, can't want to go no worse than he does. But he can't go, neither we, till we done this job. If boys will jes' stand by right an

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do this he promise we'll be goin' home jes' soon as he can git him an' us on board good old ship. So boys don't say a word an' don't do nothin' but go git picks an' shovels an' go to diggin'. That evenin' feelin' tired but more cheerful, marchin' to camp singin':

Well, I'm gonna lay my pick an' shovel down,
Down by the riverside;
Ain't gonna study war no mo'
Down by the riverside.

Yes, I'm gonna lay my bayonet down,
Down by the riverside.
Well, I ain't gonna study war no mo'
Down by the riverside.

I'm gonna lay my old gas-mask down,
Down by the riverside,
Lord, I ain't gonna study war no mo'.
Down by the riverside.

Yes, my Lord, gonna lay down my hob-nail shoes,
Down by the riverside.
An' I ain't gonna study war no mo'
Down by the riverside.

I'm gonna lay my field pack down,
Down by the river.

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An' I ain't gonna study war no mo'.
Down by the riverside.

Well, I'm gonna lay my helmet down
Down by the river.
I ain't gonna study war no mo'
Down by the riverside.

Yes, I'm gonna lay my meskit down.
Down by the river,
Well, we gonna end this warfare
Down by the riverside.

Well, if you git there before I do,
Down by the river;
Tell all the folks I'm comin' too,
Down by the riverside.

Howsomever, I ain't never gonna eat no mo' salmon long as I live. Make me think 'bout dead bodies dug up. Jes' can't do it. Couldn't eat gold fish fer supper that night. So I asks mess sargent to give me sumpin' else. Wouldn't do it, told me to take it or leave it, nothin' to him. I been workin' hard all day, showin' fine spirit, doin' best I could. Now, don't give me nothin' to eat but two dam' little slices dry bread. I tells sargent I'm gonna have some more to eat. He's gonna *make* me some sup-

per leastwise me or him gonna eat breakfast in hell. Don't make no difference to me which one it is. So 'bout that time captain comes 'long an' asks whut's all trouble about. I tells him an' he says I'm right, to give me some mo' supper.

'Nother hard job had to do wus cleanin' up battle-fields an' towns an' pickin' up shells an' grenades. Dam' flyin' devil grenades mos' dangerous thing man ever seen. Would fill up old ammunition trucks an' go snortin' an' puffin' through country like Fords goin' to church meetin'. Had some sorrowful things happen. Some boys got blowed up. Maybe would tickle fusin' contraption on potater masher or sumpin'. Five boys got blowed up till couldn't tell who they wus. Jes' been paid off, couldn't tell pieces French money, whut it wus.

One of best men in whole company got blowed to pieces. Wus carryin' sack of grenades. Stumbled an' fell an' blowed self to pieces. Wus good man, very religious always writin' home for folks to pray for him.

Thought heap of his white folks. Found letter which he wus gonna send to 'em. Wus jes' after President Wilson been over an' so he wus writin'

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home tellin' white folks 'bout hope they wus well and hope children would be president some day.

Mr. & Mrs. Jim Boyerkin and Family:

with best respect to you all i take great pleasure in writing you all i am very well and hop you are the same. it is very rainy an' muddy over here an' all boys getting mighty homesick to come home. which I am one. Boys heard 'bout President Wilson an' feel like he is big man an' thanks to the good Lord good works will go on after war is over. These be serious times an' country may be in bad shape an' we want you all to pray for us when we come back. Will take man with a iron heart an' mind to git this country on workin' basis again for both colored and white. please say to my good little friend master Jim Jr. that i hope som day that he will be the head of this country. and, all so Miss Jenny. that i may heare that she is at the head of all the wemens of the world and all the rest may follow in there footsteps. and at you and the madum age you both can set down and see what you both have accomplish in life. i truly hop that you both will continue to flourish in life and make the good lord continure to smile his everlasting blessings upon you both and whin through with this old sinful place may that blessed place we all call heaven

ME AN' WAR AN' WORLD

will be you all home and may the sweet perfumes
will be upon you alls grave. wishing you all a prolong
and a happy life and think of me often as i often
of you all. i can never for get you in the way you
treated me whin i lost my sister and i have often
ask the lord to take cere of you and don't let noth-
ing to you i hop some day i will be able to come
back and explain my self to you. please remember
me to your dear good mother say to hir that i often
think of hir and good luck to hir at all times. I re-
main *Sincerely Your Friend and Servant.*

Boys got all sorts an' kinds of letters from home.
Likewise wrote many letters. Officers would pass
mo' letters than would in war. One big boy been
in France little mo' than fourteen months come
boastin' 'bout letter he got from his wife sayin' they
got a big fine new boy. Boys sho' joreed that boy
till look like game of dozen an' got so hot had to
stop. So jes' let him alone. Maybe some fellows
singin':

I got husband, sweetheart too,
If husband don't love me, sweetheart do.
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

Had some trouble 'bout boys A. W. O. L. fightin'
an' gamblin' as did in war, only maybe mo' so.

WINGS ON MY FEET

Some boys jes' *would* go out. Seen two big fellows pushin' chests against bayonets of guards till guards had to pull 'em back else shoot boys to death. Wus aimin' to git out, wanted to be free. Seen 'em put civilian clothes on one fellow an' put sign on back signifyin' "Deserter U. S. Army."

Some high-steppin' gamblin' goin' on. One fellow everybody knowed had loaded dice. Couldn't ketch him. Everybody likes him an' nobody likes him. All set up an' conceited overlookin' everybody, don't pay nobody no mind. Seen him win seven hundred dollars an' everybody tryin' to ketch up with him with his loaded dice. Couldn't do nothin' with him. Jes' kept high-hattin' boys.

Wake up, old rounders, you sleep too late,
Money-makin' man done pass yo' gate.
You step out, let money man step in.
If you natchel-born Eastman, can come again.

Thought I told about band bein' made up in our company. Well, would keep on addin' piece an' musicians till got maybe one of best bands in army. I wus music physicianer wid my box, twelve-string Laura in rough. Howsomever, these boys wus trained musicians and played for all sorts an' kinds occasions. So they sends 'em round all over the land to

play in different camps an' help keep soldiers pacified. Would go on trucks 'bout forty pieces and would stay at camp maybe two nights then, Lawdy, Lawd, would go on. Played on boat goin' home also.

Some fellows in band said they wus comin' back to France after war wus over. Gonna play in cabarets an' restaurants. I heard 'bout some boys doin' that in France an' London too. Some got very conceited and wicked. Cussed American flag, gonna stay in France. I heard 'bout two boys goin' back an' livin' high in Paris after war. Said colored folks wus dam' fools to stay in America, cussed flag for red, white an' blue rag. Said anybody would live in South maybe below Mason-Dixon line wus plumb fool. Thought maybe boys in France was foolish too. Well, I don't know, Lord, I don't know. Make me think 'bout tail end of Jerry Fokker burnin' up after bein' hit by Uncle Sam Flyin' Ace.

Thought 'bout po' boy got shell shock, cussin' eve'ybody an' eve'ything could think of. Jes' natchelly died. Me, I'm gonna forgit 'bout troubles if I can. Nothin' to do about it. I'm mo' like crowd lookin' to see can they find something better, maybe thinkin' 'bout good times had in good old U. S. A. Maybe

WINGS ON MY FEET

jes' singing songs to forgit feelin's, maybe singin' to help feelin's too. Can't be satisfied. Lookin' for song or something to satisfy my soul. Preacher an' boys always singing about mothers. Make me think 'bout my mama dyin' since I been in army. Chaplain captain always tryin' to git boys to sing his favorite song.

When mother prayed we had sweet rest
When mother prayed our hearts were blessed
The Spirit came an' there it stayed
For God was there when mother prayed.

One thing got my hell a-risin' was way army treated colored soldiers an' German prisoners. If Germans had to work, don't make 'em work like do colored soldiers. Jes' standin' round, workin' like foreigner or somebody, can't work like colored man. Guards don't make 'em do it. If guardin' colored soldier locked up fer jes' any little thing, don't give him no freedom like do German prisoner. Germans been killin' our boys, makin' war an' causin' all trouble, still treats 'em better than do colored soldier.

Had some hard times conflictin' with white soldiers. Would try to run us out of eatin' an' drinkin' places. Had hot times. One day white marine hits colored soldier over head with soup spoon an' takes bowl

of soup an' slashes it down over his head. He wus signifyin' colored boys couldn't eat in that place. So colored soldiers took sides, cussin' an' swearin' whut they wus gonna do to white marine. Got to fightin', Lawdy, Lawdy, some boys rushin' fer guns, gonna have regular battle. Officers come up an' got 'em stopped.

Been mighty change since I been born
Things I used to do I don't do no mo'.
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

So we keeps on workin' till finally lets us go home. Boys mighty restless, got homesick blues, got through-train blues, got deep-sea blues, got lovin'-baby blues an' every other kind of blues anybody ever had. Nothin' to do about it. Got to do it, got to have nerve if gonna live. If lose nerve gonna die. So on day we sets out for port, marches us 'bout five miles to git on ship. Howsomedever, boys don't mind last march, 'scusin' gits tired and grouchy. Maybe hollerin', "Well, boys, where do we go from here?" Maybe singin' all sorts an' kinds of songs.

Oh, it's not the pack you carry on yo' back,
Neither rifle on yo' shoulder,
Neither five-inch crust of khaki-colored dust,

WINGS ON MY FEET

Makes you feel yo' limbs growin' older.
It's not the hike on hard turnpike
That drives away yo' smile,
Neither socks of sisters raisin' bloomin' blisters,
Lawd, it's the last long mile,
Lawd, it's the last long mile.

Made me think 'bout long hikes in war in mud an' rain, with pack on my back, never could turn back. I been down that lonesome road a heap but would git so tired when come to place to fall out would jes' natchelly go to sleep with pack on my back. Wouldn't take time to move it. Thought about all times we been wet an' muddy an' hongry. Glad to leave war behind, gonna lay my burden down.

Well, come along, come along
Well, boys, let's all go home,
Oh, glory hallelujah.
Ship must be loaded,
Lord, with bright angels,
'Cause she runs, Lord, she runs,
Lord, so level an' steady,
Glory hallelujah, let's all go home.

So we marches into town. Boys feelin' homesick blues an' starts hummin' as they march. Slow movin', *hep, hep*, start hummin' song ain't got no words.

ME AN' WAR AN' WORLD

Then got to marchin' little faster, *hep, hep, hep*.
Starts up glory hallelujah song.

Glory, glory, hallelujah
As we go marchin' on
Done hung the Kaiser on sour apple tree
Done hung the Kaiser on sour apple tree
As we go marchin' on.

Some fool M. P.'s still feelin' oats tells us to stop
singin' an' go marchin' like white soldiers. Told
'em, by God, we ain't goin' through town sleepin'.
Boys mad as hell, so I starts song an' boys keeps
it up.

Hang M. P. on sour apple tree
Hang M. P. on sour apple tree
As we go marchin' on.

Some other boys started 'nother funny song wors'n
mine. So we all joins that song, Lawd, Lawd, boys
shoutin' an' singin':

Who won the war, M. P.'s?
Who won the war, M. P.'s?
M. P.'s had hell of a time,
Shootin' dam' duds behind the line.

Actual fact, tried to keep us from gettin' on that

WINGS ON MY FEET

ship. Gonna make us stay two mo' weeks. Told us we got to shine shoes, work in big rock quury, load trucks an' all sorts of work. Wus serious times, boys jes' 'bout crazy. Never did know who it wus got us on board. Must 'a' been Pop Grissley, fine old captain always standin' by colored soldiers. Lawd, gonna be heap o' times wished I could see that captain. Lord, finest white man ever put pair britches on.

So we goes on ship singin' "Good-by, France, hello, Broadway." Got on board ship 'bout 'leven o'clock in mornin'. Colored soldiers down on lower decks, 'scusin' colored band played up on big decks for shows an' dancin'. Many thousand on board, soldiers an' officers an' nurses, both colored an' white. Told us mus' be 'bout two hundred fifty nurses. Ole ship a-reelin' an' rockin', sailin' for promised land. Believe to my soul wus two hundred gamblin' games goin' on at one time. Lawd, Lawd, rollin' them bones. Officers would stop by an' watch boys, glad to have 'em doin' something to keep out of meanness. Me, I won some money. Never tried dam' rascal told you 'bout with loaded dice. Actual fact that boy won seventeen hun'ed dollars on trip 'scusin' lost some back.

Howsomever, 'bout settin' of sun boys thinkin'

'bout home an' deep blue sea. Thinkin' 'bout times
have been won't be no mo'. Different from time
goin' over on boat. Different from times on battle-
front. Different from times after Armistice. Lawdy,
on our way, can't turn back. Won't be long, now,
won't be long. So chaplain don't have no trouble
gittin' boys to sing, old boat reelin' an' rockin'.

Shine on me, shine on me,
Lord, I wonder will
Lighthouse shine on me
Shine on me, shine on me.
Well, Lord, I wonder, Lord,
Will lighthouse shine on me?

XVI. I'm Greyhound Outrunnin' Shadow
of Eagle

XVI

I'M GREYHOUND OUTRUNNIN' SHADOW OF EAGLE

So I'm on big ship out on deep wide ocean. 'Bout fohty wid the cleaver. Got them deep-sea blues, can't be satisfied. But I'm on my way, Lawd, I'm on my way. Been singing, "I want to go home, I want to go home." Well, won't be long now, won't be long. War got my buddies, never got me. Me an' war same thing. Been worried in my mind, won't be worried long.

I'm gonna lay my burden down,
Down by the riverside,
Well, I ain't gonna study war no mo'.
Down by the riverside.

Big old boat I'm sailin' on. Maybe good old ship of Zion, I don't know, Lord, I don't know. She's carryin' many a thousand 'cross to the promised land. Promised land whut I'm talkin' 'bout is good old U. S. A. Ship of Zion I'm talkin' 'bout is steamship *Imperator*. Thousand souls I'm talkin' 'bout, all sorts an' kinds both colored an' white.

WINGS ON MY FEET

Good God-a-mighty, this ship's gonna run,
An' carry me back where I come from.

Big band I told about in France on board. Maybe best musicianers and music physicianers army can afford, I don't know. Leastwise can play them marchin' tunes an' homesick blues an' every other kind of music anybody ever played. I'm feelin' my hell a-risin'. Got them railroad blues, got that fare. Gonna ride them cushions in the promised land, see does my baby know right from wrong.

Corn-stalk fiddle an' shoe-string bow,
My gal stuck needle in toe by Joe,
You swing Sal, I swing Sue
Gonna hug my baby through and through;
Only one thing I ever done right
Went to see my baby an' stayed all night.

All sorts an' kinds on this boat. Big officers an' generals, captains an' lieutenants, corporals an' sergeants. All sorts an' kinds of buck privates at end of line. 'Bout two hundred an' fifty nurses on board. Some French war brides with lovin' daddies. Some white folks an' some colored folks. Some crippled an' some lame, some blind an' can not see. Howsomever, all same in one manner, all goin' home.

OUTRUNNIN' SHADOW OF EAGLE

Some dancin' an' some singin'. Some sad an' sorrowful, some glad. Some gamblin' an' fightin', some prayin' an' preachin'. Some seasick an' some well. Some can't eat, some eatin' eve'ything in sight. Howsomever, me an' war is buddies, eatin's my middle name.

Eat when I can git it, sleep all the time
Don't give a dam if sun never shines.
Ain't nobody's business but my own.

Some quality white folks on board, some po' white trash. Some finest officers anybody ever seen, some mean as hell I know. Some crackers an' hill-billies, some red necks an' sagers. Some half-strainers, too. Some fine colored boys, some jes' natchelly too turrible to live. Some big black boys look like blue black, some brown like copper statue or pitcher. Some high yellow an' some medium brown, some blue vein an' some pass for white. Nothin' to do about it, just suits me, Lord, it just suits me.

Sweet black gal is my livin'
Sweet high brown's my home
Nobody's business but my own.

Me, I'm quality. Here I stands comin' befo' world like gourd vine. Been to war, comin' back. All un-

WINGS ON MY FEET

der same persimmon tree. War never got me never will. Got my buddies never got me. I'm magic black boy, rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet. I'm white man an' black man, high yellow an' brown, blue-vein angel an' devil saint. Neither is I white, red neck, hillbilly an' cracker, neither black, neither yellow, neither brown.

I'm Africa an' good old U. S. A. I'm France an' good United States. I'm Jack Johnson landin' knockout on white hope. I'm greyhound outrun-
nin' eagle shadow. I'm gorilla breakin' bones of man, I'm fightin' devil an' peaceful saint. I'm lovin' daddy an' cruel papa.

Oh, my baby, Lawd,
You don't know my mind,
When you think I'm lovin' you,
I'm leavin' you behind.

That old band's a playin', deep old sea rollin'. Got them crazy blues, can't be satisfied. I'm livin' now, Lawd, I'm livin' high. Still, I'm last year an' tomorrow, I'm Thursday an' next week. I'm Saturday and good old restin' Sunday too. I'm Friday with devil jaybird an' Monday rollin' black-cat bones. I'm the first mornin', I'm Adam walkin' in Garden of Eden, an' I'm sinner man in last judgment day.

OUTRUNNIN' SHADOW OF EAGLE

I wus born 4000 years ago,
Ain't nothin' I don't know.
Don't you grieve after me.

That old ship's a-reelin' an' a-rockin', carryin' me
back where I come from. Got them deep-sea blues,
can't be satisfied. Nothin' to do about it. I'm
principled up like this. I can do what I have to do.
I can travel all night an' I can sleep like a man
that's dead. I'm night an' day, sunup and sundown.
Can stare my eyes out an' I can roll 'em like sands
of sea. I'm man ugly as crooked sin, lookin' for
them purty angels I can see. I'm mean as hell I
know, wishin' I wus in heaven settin' down. I'm
hard-hearted, got tender-hearted blues, grievin' in
my mind.

Sometimes I hangs my head an' cries,
But Jesus gonna wipe my weepin' eyes,
When I git to heaven gonna ease, ease,
Me and my God gonna do as we please.

Me, I'm quality, all sorts an' kinds. I'm little lost
child cryin' in piney woods an' I'm road hustlin'
rambler gonna blow you down. I'm young man
breakin' up them jamborees an' I'm old man singin'
"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Comin' for to Carry
Me Home." I'm hoodoo an' magic, an' I'm King

WINGS ON MY FEET

Jesus' bosom friend. I'm sweet music makin' melody up in sky, an' I'm tom-tom boomin' blood in deep jungle. I'm shoutin' laughter an' I'm fallin' tears.

Oh, my baby, you don't know my mind
When you think I'm laughing
Laughing jes' to keep from cryin'.

Big high waves rollin', maybe storm comin' up, I don't know. Nothin' to me, I'm storm myself. I'm rollin' thunder an' flashin' lightning. I'm wind blowin' in jungle. I'm snake god an' roarin' lion. I'm up on mountaintop an' I'm down in valley. I'm dessert an' I'm bottom-land. I'm cloud an' I'm sunshine. I'm wet an' I'm dry.

If ocean wus whisky an' sea wus rye,
I'd swim 'cross ocean an' drink sea dry,
If you ketch me sober make me drink again,
I'm wanderin' about, don't deny my name.

Havin' good time up on deck, some po' boys moanin' down below. All same to me. I'm light-hearted man gonna have good time, an' I'm po' boy sorrowful with aching-hearted blues. If calls me lazy bones, I can let that work alone, an' I can work mo'n four men, leastwise mo'n three. I can say,

OUTRUNNIN' SHADOW OF EAGLE

"Yes, suh, thank you, sir," an' I can hide my feelin's
an' not let on.

Me an' my baby an' my baby's friend
Can pick mo' cotton than a cotton gin.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

I got wings on my feet. I'm travelin man. Did you
hear 'bout that travelin' man? Run so dad-bob fast
till feet sot fields of cotton an' corn on fire. Police
chased him with automobile from early mornin' till
late at night. Never could ketch him. Neither could
they ketch him with bloodhounds, neither with mot-
o'-cycle. Could run so fast till one day went to
spring to git jug of water. Well spring wus two miles
from his house. So he drops jug an' broke it an'
goes home to git 'nother jug an' gits back befo'
water hit ground.

Over the fence an' through the pasture
White man run, but he run faster.
Lawd, don't you grieve after me.

I'm magic black man myself, rainbow round my
shoulder, wings on my feet. Did you hear 'bout that
travelin' man? Run so dad-bob fast till he been
stopped 'bout thirteen minutes befo' his shadow
ketch up with him. Thought police shot him with rifle
an' laid po' body down, but never got him that time.

WINGS ON MY FEET

They sent down South for his mother,
She was grieved and moved with tears,
When she open the coffin to see her son,
The fool had disappeared.

I'm Alabama bound, Lawd, but if train break down
I got wings on my feet to carry me on. Did you
hear 'bout that travelin' man? Police thought they
caught him. Never got him that time. Wus magic
black boy with wings on his feet.

They put him on the gallows
They thought that he would die,
He crossed his legs an' winked his eye
An' sailed up in the sky.

I'm some magic black man myself, rainbow round
my shoulders, wings on my feet. War never got me,
never will. Got my buddies, never got me. German
shells bustin' all round, never hit me. Influenza
train a-runnin', I never had no ticket. Big ships
sinkin', never sunk me. Did you hear 'bout that
travelin' man? Lawd, Lawd, talk about it.

He jumped off that *Titanic*,
They thought he wus a fool,
In jes' about ten minutes
Wus rollin' bones in Liverpool.

Did you hear 'bout Blue Jim an' Chocolate Drop?
 Wus both magic black men, wings on their feet.
 Blue Jim would have barrel whisky. Officers
 couldn't pour it out. Would git 'rested an' put in
 jail. Nex' minute would be walkin' 'bout sayin',
 "Good mornin', officer, how's yo' health?" Would
 shoot at him, couldn't hit him. Slim Joe wus Choco-
 late Drop jes' Natchelly meltin' between jail bars.
 Couldn't stop him. Onliest place could keep him in
 be dungeon or sumpin' an' told me he could flit out
 o' that like bat or sumpin'.

Slim Joe was Chocolate Drop,
 Slim Joe dropped down a cop,
 Jails got Slim Joe at last,
 Jail bars wus strong an' fast,
 But Chocolate melted away.

Howsomever, need some magic, need rainbow round
 my shoulder, wings on my feet. Needed 'em in
 France. Needed 'em on deep wide ocean. Gonna
 need 'em all my life. Gonna need 'em to git black
 scoundrel shot my buddy. That boy been talkin'
 'bout *comin'*. Now he's *gwine*. I can run some my-
 self if I have to do it, wings on my feet.

I believes in a ghost, I believes in a ha'nt,
 Good God-a-mighty, I ain't no saint,

WINGS ON MY FEET

Ain't got no arms, ain't got no haid,
Don't stop to count them tracks I made.

Well, I'm on my way, Lawd, I'm on my way. Won't be long now, won't be long. Gonna see my Mamie Lou. Gonna ride them cushions till I go stone blind. Gonna go stompin' in town an' tell about it. If my train breaks down, got wings on my feet to carry me on.

Ridin' of a goat, leadin' of a sheep,
Won't be back till middle of week;
Git up in the mornin', kill that calf,
Gonna eat beefsteak, long as it lasts.

Ship's slowin' down, won't be long, Lawd, won't be long. Wonder does my baby know right from wrong. Wouldn't swap one high yellow an' two teasin' browns fer all French mamyselles this side o' hell. Look out, high brown baby, yo' lovin' daddy's on the way! If ship break down, got wings on my feet. Oh, my Lord, my high brown lady can make a panther squall. Can make a rabbit spit in bulldog's face. Can make a bulldog break his chain. Can make a tadpole hug a whale. Oh, my Lord, can make a preacher lay his Bible down, an' make deacons in corner howl out, "Don't you leave me here."²²

OUTRUNNIN' SHADOW OF EAGLE

Well, I'm on my way, Lawd, I'm on my way, if
ship gits waterbound, got wings on my feet.

Well, when you see me comin',
Better h'ist yo' windows high;
An' when you see me leavin'
Tuck yo' head an' cry.
'Cause last years I wus in Rackinsack
An' now, by God, I'm rackin' back.

XVII. Ain't Gonna Study War No Mo'

XVII

AIN'T GONNA STUDY WAR NO MO'

So BIG ship docks. Whistles blowin', bands playin', eve'ybody talkin' an' goin' on. Red Cross an' Salvation Army meets us an' passes out things to soldiers, both colored an' white. Big crowds cheerin'. Feel like soldier in army of the Lord. Feel like patriot, proud to have name of soldier. Gonna have good time, ain't gonna work no mo'. Glad we gonna git our discharge, won't be long, Lawd, won't be long.

I'm gonna lay my burden down,
Ain't gonna study war no mo'.
Don't you grieve after me.

So we takes ferry an' train an' goes over to same camp which we wus in befo' we sailed for overseas. Been mighty change since we been gone. Many long weary days have passed. Some buddies never did come back. Po' Shorty Geech an' Funny Sam an' other boys sleepin' in their graves in France. Feel powerful sorrowful, 'scusin' glad to git back. War never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me.

WINGS ON MY FEET

We stayed there from Wednesday 'bout three o'clock till Friday mornin' 'bout ten when we left on train for Camp Gordon. Wus long train Pullman cars windin' round them curves. Boys mighty glad to git on board. Ridin' them cushions settin' rared back. Ridin' them Pullman cars to the promised land. Mighty different now from whut wus when we started to camp, crowded all up in day coaches like I told 'bout. Sho' God, different from ridin' in French box cars. So boys starts to singin'. One crowd singin' maybe:

Well, I may be sick an' can not rise,
But I'll meet you at station when train comes along;
Well, I may be lame an' can not walk,
But I meet you at station when train comes along.

Maybe 'nother crowd hollerin', Lawdy, Lawd, listen at her runnin', runnin' like she never run befo'. Listen at her blow, Lawd, she blow like she never blow befo', oh, she blow like she never blow befo'.

Poke my head out window, see train comin',
Got on board an' she never stop runnin',
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

Other boys singin' all sorts an' kinds of songs. "Long, Long Trail a-Winding," "Keep Yo' Head

Down, Fritzie Boy," "Keep Yo' Shades Down, Mary Ann," "Parlevou, Parlevou," "Zip, Zip," an' all sorts an' kinds o' funny songs learned on other side. Some boys still big fools, jes' can't help it. Old train's moverin' long, boys thinkin' 'bout it, talkin' 'bout it, won't be long, now, won't be long. Singin' old train song:

Well, Joseph Mica wus good engineer,
Told his fireman not to fear;
All he want wus boiler hot,
Run into Atlanta 'bout four o'clock.

So we goes on out to Camp Gordon on good old Southern road. Got in them good old cantonment barracks. Good-by, France, hello, Georgia; good-by, rain, an' good-by, mud. Won't be long now, Lawd, I'm on my way an' can't turn back. Lord, sun don't set in the morning. Got rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.

Some o' these mornin's bright an' fair
Gonna hitch my wings an' try the air.
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

We stayed there jes' precisely one week. Didn't know what day neither hour would we git discharged. So boys stayed in camp. No trouble at

WINGS ON MY FEET

all keepin' 'em in line. So they gives us uniform, maybe two shirts an' underwear, hat an' overcoat. Thought Salvation Army done give us socks an' handkerchiefs. So treated us fine, better than we been treated befo'. Thought we gonna be livin' easy, gonna be livin' high.

Well, ain't no use me workin' so
'Cause, Lawd, I ain't gonna work no mo',
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

Thought I would go see my sister, also mother of white captain got killed I told 'bout lived in same town my mama did. Been mighty change since I been gone. Felt sorry for myself, my mama bein' dead an' buried whilst I been in army, nobody to carry my troubles too. Found my sister an' her children doin' very well. Leastwise had used all money I sent home to keep till I come back.

Went to see white lady, mother of white captain got killed in France and lady my mama worked for. Felt mighty sorry for po' lady. Ask me how did her son die? Did I see him? Wus he sufferin'? Did he talk about his mother befo' he died? An' heap mo' questions which I wus tellin' her yes'm best way I could.

So I didn't stay there long. White lady an' husband told me would give me good job at house or workin' on college grounds or buildings. Howsomever, I wus not ready to settle down. Wus too restless, neither had I been to see my old friends, neither had I found black scoundrel that shot my buddy.

So I starts on road again. Thought I would ride cushions till my money give out. So first place I stops at wus town I worked in befo'. My friends showed me good time treatin' me better, maybe better than I been treated befo'. Had my uniform on, told 'em 'bout France, made 'em think I wus talkin' French. Lord, I wus boy back home, jes' natchelly been mo' places than anybody else.

Howsomever, white folks told me would give me half-hour, whether would I take my uniform off or leave town. I tells 'em I'm soldier of Uncle Sam, I been fightin' in France, can't do nothin' with mé. They tells me they don't give a dam, I ain't no soldier neither, nothin' but dam' nigger an' can't have me wearin' uniform. So they sends crowd o' boys askin' me will I leave or will I not. Nothin' to do 'bout it 'scusin' maybe I'm mutterin':

'Scuse me, mister, don't git mad,
Gonna raise a ruckus to-night,

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'Cause you look like sumpin' buzzard had,
Gonna raise ruckus to-night.

So I leaves there walkin' an' talkin' to myself, feels my hell a-risin'. Nothin' to do 'bout it. I can do what I have to do, an' maybe time come when I have to do it. Heard 'bout other boys in Tennessee an' Mississippi an' other states. Tore uniform off one boy. Nothin' to do 'bout it. White folks principled up like this, they don't keer if we been good soldiers or bad, we jes' come befo' them as man with black skin.

Some boys maybe made fools of 'selves after comin' home from war. Look like war went to heads. Wanted to show off. In army couldn't say "yes sir" and "no sir" to nobody 'scusin' officers. So some boys would come home an' try same thing. Made white folks mad. Some boys got struck down, maybe on account of own doin's. White man in South principled up like this, jes' ain't gonna think 'bout colored man as equal.

Heard 'bout one colored soldier refusin' to take off uniform, neither would he leave town. Called on policemens, wouldn't do nothin'. Called on white officers in camp, and they tells him that's all right,

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to keep on his uniform, they will stand by him. Still he wus skeered. So that night when crowd come to git him, had 'nother crowd an' fohty-fohs an' never got him. Soldiers in camp took keer of him like they said. Howsomever, in few days colored soldier disappeared an' nobody never did know to this day whut become of him.

So we had some hard times in South jes' after war. White folks lookin' for Negro soldiers to raise ruck-us. Heard 'bout sheriff's gittin' machine-gun, gittin' ready to blow us down, did we make attack. Heard 'bout one whole town gittin' het up, thought colored people wus drillin' at night. Way it wus, lodge wus havin' big initiatin' ceremony, marchin' round an' singin' an' goin' on. Some of boys naturally be imitatin' army an' white folks spyin' on 'em thought wus drillin'.

Well, I'm gonna lay my burden down,
Ain't gonna study war no mo'
Down by the riverside.

Some boys wrote buddies not to be comin' South. Got to fight way through mo' so than in war. No use standin' for all that slightin' our reputations. We been soldiers. Been fightin' in France. Been doin'

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same things, maybe givin' up our lives. Ain't no sense in us bein' treated jes' like dog or sumpin'. Nothin' to do about it. Times whut been won't be no mo'. Times ain't like we been thinkin' would be. So I can do what I have to do. Got rainbow round my shoulder, wings on my feet.

A man in Georgia pulled a gun
An' took a shot at me.
Jes' as he took the second shot
I passed through Tennessee.

So I starts out. Thought I would go back up North. Thought I would ride cushions till my money give out. Goin' to see my friends an' buddies, ain't gonna work no mo'. So I gits off at Philadelphia, place I been befo'. Same thing. Too many soldiers back all come under same gourd vine. Jes' lak never been to war. Nothin' to do about it. So I'm movin' on always some place better, road callin' me on.

If I feel to-morrow, Lord,
Like I feel to-day,
Good God, gonna pack my suitcase,
Lord, an' walk away.

Thought I would go to California. Been there one time. Thought I would like that better. Would walk

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away from bein' mistreated soldier. So I rides cushion some an' works my way some. Howsomever, don't like it out there, neither can I git much to do. Feels like po' boy long way from home, ain't got a friend in this world.

I'm out in this wide world alone,
Got nobody to carry my troubles to,
Good man jes' ain't treated right,
Oh, look down that lonesome road an' cry.

So I feels my hell a-risin'. Gonna roll them bones. Gonna git some money an' play bad. So I'm gamblin' man, startin' with little money an' raisin' 'em higher. Black-cat bones an' Adam an' Eve charm workin' this time.

Come on, bones, an' treat me nice,
Roll 'em, soldier, roll them dice,
Tain't nobody's business but my own.

'Scusin' I ain't soldier no mo'. Been mighty change since I been born. Change where I been, ain't change me. I'm travelin' man, I'm high brown, lean an' mean, ain't no soft-bellied green rucky. Me an' war same thing. I been in all states an' foreign lands. Been had trouble all my day. Nothin' to do about it. I can do what I have to do. I'm on my way, Lord,

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I'm on my way. Gonna ride them cushions to the
promised land. Goin' where water taste like wine.
Gonna see does my honey know right from wrong.
Gonna hoodoo black devil shot my buddy.

Thought I heard that K. C. whistle blow
Blow like she never blow befo';
Oh, she blow like she never blow befo'.

So my money lasts till I gits 'bout to Wyoming. An'
I works little an' gambles some mo' an' goes on to
North Dakota through Minnesota an' Omaha work-
in' on Great Northern an' on wheat-fields an' what-
ever I could git to do. Sometime hustlin' sport, road
hustlin' like some wild bear-cat. So I works an'
gambles my way back through Minnesota, an' Ohio.
Won't be long, Lord, won't be long.

I'm goin' back to sunny South
Where sun shines on my honey's house;
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

So I comes back to Virginia an' North Carolina, then
goes on to Georgia an' Alabama an' back up Missis-
sippi to Memphis, Tennessee. Thought Memphis
good place if know how to git on 'scusin' also I stayed
in Memphis little while in trainin' an' guardin' big
bridge. So thought I would go on up to Tennessee

see could I be satisfied. Had them Memphis blues,
Lawd, an' can't be satisfied.

Well, it's come an' go to sweet Tennessee
Where the money grows on trees,
Where the women do as they please,
Lawd, come an' go to sweet Tennessee.

Howsomever, got railroad blues, can't be satisfied.
I'm leavin' here walkin' an' talkin' to myself, won't
be satisfied here an' nowhere I go. I'm bastard sol-
dier of the Cross, don't like nobody, nobody likes me.
Nothin' to do about it.

Sometimes I feel like feather in the air
Good God, I feel like I never prayed a prayer,
Well, done sold my soul to devil
An' my heart's turned back to stone,
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

So I goes on back to North Carolina an' Virginia,
then on up to Philadelphia an' New Jersey. Thought
I would road hustle to see if times be like used to be.
Seen many buddies back from war. Can't be satis-
fied. Some boys say ruther be shot than go to war
again. Some boys say they learned heap 'bout world
in war, ain't so bad, Lawd, ain't so bad. Some bud-
dies mighty bitter. Say country don't treat 'em right

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over fightin' in army. Say don't see why should fight fer Uncle Sam if Uncle Sam always 'busin' them.

Me, I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. War don't make things no better. Maybe neither worse. I don't know, Lord, I don't know. Heard some boys cussin' 'bout it. I don't give a dam. If I gits to thinkin' 'bout it, gits me mad as hell. So I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet. When I'm in Rome I'm Roman. I'm gonna think about my teasin' brown. Oh, Lord, baby, shake that thing. Whut do I keer, gonna lay my burden down, ain't gonna study war no mo'. Gonna lose myself in huggin' arms of high yaller, chocolate to the bone.

An' when she walks the street around,
Hollow of her foot makes hole in the ground;
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

So I decides to go back to big chief of construction gangs to see if I like that better. Thought 'bout old times, workin' an' gamblin', women an' hot flambotia strong. So I starts in road gang. Lord, Lord, look jes' like war. A man jes' natchelly don't count. Men an' mules an' wheelers an' captain an' walkin' boss hollerin' an' cussin'. Let wheelers roll, let wheelers roll. White man war, white man machines drivin' like Big Bertha or fast freight or sumpin'. Thought

about it, Lord, thought about it. I'm still high private in rear rank. Been to war an' come back. Me an' war same thing. War never got me, never will. Yet I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet.

Gonna meet my dear old mother,
Down by the riverside;
Ain't gonna study war no mo',
Down by the riverside.

So I wus thinkin' 'bout all them times we had in France, an' 'bout all places I been to an' all things I done. Must 'a' got keerless 'cause 'bout that time stone crusher come down on my arm. Thought it smashed it clean off. Captain hollerin' at me what hell I'm doin'. Oh, my Lord, how in hell I know whut I'm doin'? So lost my left arm. Nothin' to do about it, goddam.

Trouble, trouble been had it all my days,
Trouble meet me at the do',
I'm goin' where trouble ain't no mo',
Lord, don't you grieve after me.

So I starts again as hustlin' sport. Maybe women'e treat me little better with one arm, like po' boy needin' friend. Can shoot with my good right hand an' maybe don't git in so many fights. Leastwise, I ain't bother yet. Seen mo' buddies travelin' round. Heard 'em talkin' 'bout war. All come under same gourd

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vine. Heard Pullman porters an' cooks an' hustlin' sports an' rum-runners. Thought they wus havin' hard time. Heard one big boy say Uncle Sam gonna git in war with Britishers, 'cause of sinkin' of rum ship an' killin' colored man. Said, by God, he jes' soon fight with British, neither why should he fight with Uncle Sam. Me, I ain't studyin' 'bout it. I ain't bother yet, I ain't bother yet.

Well, I'm goin' back to Birmingham,
And I do not give a dam,
If I takes a toddy now an' then,
'Tain't nobody's business but my own.

Seen one po' colored soldier boy wus wounded in France. Lost both arms an' both legs till would crawl on stubs of arms an' legs, head holdin' up an' eyes peepin' out like turtle or sumpin'. Was sorrowful sight. Still wus cheerful boy, everybody likes him, womens good to him. Thought they told me Law goes an' has po' boy 'rested for bootleggin' liquor. Said preacher wus whut told on him. Thought it must be dam' scoundrel shot my buddy. Oh, my Lord, gonna git him if last thing I do.

I feels my hell a-risin'
Risin' three feet a day,
If keep on risin'
Gonna wash this world away.

White man gives me job as night watchman at 'lectric plant. Thought he treated me fine. He wus pleasant to me an' I wus pleasant to him. Thought maybe I would be satisfied. So one night somebody come prowlin' round. I been guardin' in army an' so I says, "Halt, who goes there?" He don't say nothin' an' starts runnin'. So I tells him to halt, which he does not comply with my order. So I shoots. Wus white man. Oh, my Lord, trouble, trouble, been had it all my day, gonna have it till I die.

Oh, my Lord, where shall I go
 For to ease my trouble in mind?
 Lord, don't you grieve after me.

So Law 'rested me an' put me in jail. Big crowd white folks gatherin', thought would move me over to county jail. Crowd kept comin'. So thought better call out company of soldiers. Could look out of jail bars an' see soldiers settin' round an' standin' up. Good-God-a-mighty, thought about it. Been mighty change since I been born. Change where I been, ain't change me. Thought about me bein' soldier, proud of name of soldier, workin' an' fightin' in France. Now soldiers guardin' me to keep folks from stringing me up. All jes' 'cause I done whut I wus told to do in army. Wus some other colored boys in prison. Oh, my Lord, heard 'em singing:

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I am climbing Jacob's ladder,
I am climbing Jacob's ladder,
I am climbing Jacob's ladder,
Soldier of the Cross.

Every round is higher and higher,
Every round is higher and higher,
Every round is higher and higher,
Soldier of the Cross.

Do you think I'll make a soldier,
Do you think I'll make a soldier,
Do you think I'll make a soldier,
Soldier of the Cross.

Never hurt white man much. Jes' shot 'im through chest. So after he gits well, good white folks got me off. Thought about it, Lawd, thought about it. Been mighty change since I been born. Change where I been, ain't changed me. Thought about trainin' in camp. Thought about war in France. Thought about my mama's papa tellin' me 'bout fightin' tribes of Africa. Me an' war same thing. Had it all my day. Gonna have it till I die. Howsomever, war never got me, never will. Got my buddies, never got me.

Lord, been mighty change since I been born. Lord, I wonder is good old U. S. A. gonna blow me down. Thought about marchin' in New York, peoples cheerin' colored soldiers. Thought 'bout singing on boat goin' over when torpedo missed us. Thought

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about singin' on ship comin' back an' on train goin' home.

Lord, I wonder will lighthouse
Shine on me, shine on me;
Lord, I wonder will lighthouse
Shine on me, shine on me.

Thought about boys singin' in France, 'bout packin' up yo' troubles in yo'r old kit bag, an' me yodlin', "Oh, where shall I go for to ease my trouble in mind?" Well, I don't know, Lord, I don't know. Been mighty change since I been born. Change where I been, never changed me. Maybe some other crowd git me some other day. Maybe neither will they blow me down. Well, I don't know, Lord, I don't know. I'm leavin' here, won't be long now, Lord, won't be long. Gonna rock trouble to sleep, rainbow round my shoulders, wings on my feet. Well, don't you grieve after me, Lord, don't you grieve after me.

I'm gonna lay my burden down,
Ain't gonna study war no mo';
Yes, by God, I'll be in heaven,
When I lay my burden down;
Ain't gonna study war no mo',
Down by the riverside.

THE END



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Wings on my feet

